

WALTER DE LA MARE: A STUDY OF HIS POETRY

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PhD. TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

1984



DECLARATION

I declare this thesis
to be entirely my own work

SIGNED:

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Edinburgh, 1984

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been greatly encouraged in the preparation of this thesis by discussions with Professor Wallace Robson, my Supervisor. I should like to thank him for his comments and advice, and also Professor James Thorne whom I consulted about some of the technical, linguistic aspects of Chapter 9. I should also like to thank Professor Luce Bonnerot for her interest, and for permitting me to quote from her own published thesis on Walter de la Mare; and Mr Richard de la Mare, for kindly granting me an interview and for allowing me to reproduce this in an abridged version in Appendix II. He has also given me permission to quote extensively from his father's works.

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to fill a gap in the evaluation of Walter de la Mare's poetry caused by the fact that the critical works available are either early or slight in scope, or not in English. The study is based on the adult poetry, although the critical prose, stories, novels and poetry for children have been referred to where relevant. PART I deals with the Man and his ideas; PART II with his poetry, with special reference to his imagery and technique. CHAPTER 1 gives a brief biographical sketch and touches on the Georgian background and what the term Georgian means. Because de la Mare left no memoirs or autobiography, CHAPTERS 2 and 3 set forth his views on literature and life, illustrated by quotations from his prose writings, particularly his articles in the *Times Literary Supplement* from 1908 to 1938. His love of the English language, his belief in the connection between sound and meaning, his emphasis on inspiration, imagination and the seeing eye, on simplicity and clarity, and on the necessity for hard work in the making of poetry are noted, as well as the importance to him of the themes of childhood, dream, solitude, time and death. In CHAPTERS 4 and 5, his general philosophy of life, as deduced from his poetry, is also analyzed, with some references to the Bible, Wordsworth, Hardy and Housman. His belief in the importance of love, his appreciation of nature and his ambivalent views on the existence of a God and on the nature of life and death are discussed. CHAPTERS 6 and 7 examine the generally romantic and 'literary' character of his imagery and also his use of 'natural', concrete imagery from the material world, these points being illustrated by his handling of the image of the house, and by discussion of two contrasting poems. His development of the romantic theme of the Traveller and the Quest is shown chronologically. In CHAPTER 8, his use of the image of the Goal — Eden and the Ideal Vision — is discussed with other favourite images, and illustrated by analyses of selected poems. His connections with Traherne, Vaughan, Blake, Wordsworth, Edwin Muir and Dylan Thomas, and the Platonic concept of the innocent child are noted, and it is suggested that his thought is often modern though set in a romantic background — some links with Clough, Hardy and T. S. Eliot being postulated. In CHAPTER 9, the diversity of his themes, method and techniques are illustrated by analyses of some poems, and his exceptional technical ability, particularly in the exploitation of the sound of words, is revealed. Walter de la Mare's critical reputation has been uneven, and he has, on the whole, been neglected by academic studies. In this thesis the view that he has nothing to say to the modern world is questioned. He is located in the main stream of English romantic poetry, which runs from Blake and Wordsworth to Hardy and twentieth century romantics like Edwin Muir and Dylan Thomas, and his work is shown to be more varied, interesting and accomplished than is at present generally realized.

A NOTE ON THE REFERENCES

1. Walter de la Mare's books, especially the stories and poems, if not already in the List of Abbreviations, are generally referred to only by the principal word(s) in the titles, for example:

<i>The Riddle and Other Stories</i>	<i>Riddle</i>
<i>Memory and Other Poems</i>	<i>Memory</i>
<i>Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes</i>	<i>Peacock Pie</i>
<i>Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe</i>	<i>Desert Islands</i>

2. The place of publication of books is London unless otherwise stated.
 3. All quotations from the poems are taken from *The Complete Poems (CP)* (1969).
 4. Stanzas of poems are numbered by Roman numerals in lower case. Stanzas in the long poems, *The Traveller* and *Winged Chariot*, which are not numbered in *The Complete Poems*, are referred to by giving first, the page in *CP* where they appear, and then numbering them from the top of that page, for example CP593, i—ix, or marginalia i—iii.
 5. In his collections of essays, *Private View (PV)* and *Pleasures and Speculations (PS)*, de la Mare often revised and added to the original articles and essays reprinted from the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* and other sources. In general, quotations from *TLS* follow the original wording, and the *TLS* page numbers are then given. Where the wording is taken from *PV* or *PS*, which is usually the case with articles reprinted from *Edinburgh Review*, *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and other journals, the page numbers then refer to *PS* or *PV*.
 6. Where de la Mare's articles in *TLS* have been cited, exact references have been made in the notes to the issues in which they originally appeared, and often also to *PV* and *PS*. For even easier reference, they have been numbered to correspond to Edward Wagenknecht's 'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the London *Times Literary Supplement*', *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), pp.243—55, where more information is supplied about each article, for example (W.1).
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

The works listed below are all by Walter de la Mare unless otherwise stated.

BTD	<i>Behold, This Dreamer: Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, the Unconscious, the Imagination, Divination, the Artist, and Kindred Subjects</i>	1939
CH	<i>Come Hither: A Collection of Rhymes for the Young of all Ages</i>	1923
CP	<i>The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare</i>	1969
EOM	<i>Early One Morning in the Spring: Chapters on Children and on Childhood as it is revealed in particular in Early Memories and in Early Writings</i>	1935
L'Œuvre	<i>L'Œuvre de Walter de la Mare: Une aventure spirituelle</i> , by Luce Bonnerot	1969
PS	<i>Pleasures and Speculations</i>	1940
PV	<i>Private View</i>	1953
Tea	<i>Tea with Walter de la Mare</i> by Russell Brain	1957
TLS	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i> Articles by de la Mare Anonymous articles by other contributors	1908-38 1916-32
Tribute	<i>Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday</i>	1948
WCh.	<i>Winged Chariot</i>	1951
W.	'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the <i>London Times Literary Supplement</i> ', by Edward Wagenknecht, in <i>Boston University Studies in English</i> , I, 4 (1955-56), pp.243-55	1955

THE INQUISITOR

In memory of Walter de la Mare, 25 April 1873—22 June 1956

Wherefore and whither? Who, how, what and why?
Never was such inveterate questioner,
Never was metaphysician more aware
Of Earth's profound decoying mystery.
A flint sufficed him as an augury;
A weed no less; a bird aloft in air;
The commonest thing became uniquely rare
Beneath his ardent, scrutinizing eye.
With life so enigmatic to his mind,
No less obscure for being beautiful,
Can we wonder what he'll hope to find
Beyond Earth's bounds foreshortened to a tomb;
What marvels will transport him; above all,
What questions he'll be asking, and of whom?

Ralph Lawrence

English, 11 (1956), p.91

PART I

WALTER DE LA MARE: THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS

- CHAPTER 1 The Man and his Literary Background
- CHAPTER 2 His Views on Literature:
 From his Critical and Other Prose Writings
- CHAPTER 3 His Views on Life in relation to Poetry:
 From his Critical and Other Prose Writings
- CHAPTER 4 His Views on Life: From his Poems I
- CHAPTER 5 His Views on Life: From his Poems II

CHAPTER 1

THE MAN AND HIS LITERARY BACKGROUND

(1) INTRODUCTION: HIS PERSONALITY

My mind to me a kingdom is,
Such present joys therein I find,
That it excels all other bliss
That world affords or grows by kind. ¹

Walter de la Mare used the first four words of this sixteenth century poem as the title of the last literary essay in his book *Private View*. ² He explained there that for him travels in the mind were just as exciting as actual physical journeys in the world of reality, and that to share with a genius his travels in the mind is an adventure: 'His travels are, to our own degree, ours for the mere wishing — his birds, flowers, streams, valleys, wildernesses, gulfs, peaks, seas, vision of paradise and celestial ocean'. ³ So too, we can share de la Mare's imaginative journeys in the mind and may thus come to discover something about him, for there is very little factual information to be found about his life. What there is is either early and thus not up-to-date, such as the studies by Mégroz (1924) and Forrest Reid (1929), which contain brief biographical sketches, or slight in scope like the later monographs by Kenneth Hopkins (1953), Leonard Clark (1960) and D. Ross McCrosson (1966). ⁴ It is possible to glean some miscellaneous biographical material from memoirs, books and articles which contain anecdotes about him, for example, Russell Brain's *Tea with Walter de la Mare* (1957), and the

collection of articles by friends in *Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday*, but he himself has provided no autobiography and no memoirs.⁵ So it seems essential to go to his own literary writings to discover something about him and particularly about what he called his 'real' life — the life of his mind. 'He who is simply the imaginative man', said G. K. Chesterton, 'can only be found in the images he makes and not in the portraits of him that other people make';⁶ and de la Mare himself said that 'poetry always revealed the truth about the poet'.⁷ In his essay on Walter de la Mare, Harold Child wrote:

His own psychology, as we call it nowadays, the events and influences in his life which have made his dream world his real world, provide and will provide a very interesting study for the kind of literary criticism which looks upon the finished work chiefly for what it may tell about the inner history of the man who created it. No bad concomitant of such a study . . . is the contemplation . . . of the finished work, of the poetry as it appears in lines of black letters on white paper, thence passing through the eye to the ear and to the mind. 8

Such a psychological and biographical study is not the aim of this thesis. But, in spite of the dicta of critics such as Empson who believe that a poem is an anonymous, timeless structure of meanings which should be studied in complete isolation from its creator, a work of art is always interesting (as Child said) not only in itself, but also in so far as it tells us something about the artist. And so, although the main aim of this thesis is to study de la Mare's poetry, particularly with regard to imagery and technique, and to suggest that he has been academically neglected, it is hoped also that something of the inner history and personality of the man and his views on literature and life can be revealed from his writings. This was indeed the object which Luce Bonnerot had in her own mind when

she wrote her detailed and invaluable thesis: 'C'est ce que nous nous proposons de faire: écouter les confidences de de la Mare dans son oeuvre, en espérant que nous saurons être ce "compagnon intérieur" capable de les comprendre et de les interpréter'. ⁹

The facts about de la Mare's life given in the biographical dictionaries show that it was, in truth, comparatively uneventful and quiet. ¹⁰ He did not travel much, 'his adventures have not included shipwrecks, forest fires or midnight alarms'. ¹¹ But this tranquil existence did not prevent him from following an imaginative life full of incident. For he is not just a poet who sits 'by some tarn' in the hills observing nature. He is also the poet who visits Arabia, who travels the 'wild abyss' of the universe of the eye; who haunts distant and deserted dwellings; who travels on time's 'Winged Chariot' to a 'strange Hall of Mirrors'. ¹² It is, as Reid said, not necessary to have a detailed knowledge of the events of his outward existence to appreciate this imaginative poetry and follow him in his journeys in the mind. 'A great deal of Mr. de la Mare's work is the creation of a mind brooding upon its earthly pilgrimage, but, though the material of autobiography may be there, it has been translated by imagination into poetry or fiction, and mingled with much that had its origin in the imagination alone'. ¹³ That life of the imagination was indeed apparently enough for him. He told Russell Brain that he had no regrets at not having travelled much, and that 'he would find it hard to choose between living in dreams and real life'. ¹⁴

De la Mare's joys and adventures then, which we can share when we read his poems and stories, were primarily in the kingdom of the

mind and he had a lively companion in his own inward self, his 'Inward Companion' :

A self in solitude made wise;
As if within the heart may be
All the soul needs for company. 15 (CP473)

But on the other hand he was a 'strange traveller' between two worlds — the worlds of reality and imagination, as was Nahum Taroone his anagrammatic boy of 'human nature' in the allegorical introduction to his anthology *Come Hither*.¹⁶ Walter de la Mare, in the person of the boy Simon, often visited Nahum's round tower of fantasy, full of a fascinating 'hugger-mugger of strange objects' at the top of the house of Thrae (Earth), with its 'multitude of rooms, with their coffer and presses and cabinets, containing I knew not what treasures and wonders!' ¹⁷ But his images were more often taken from the clearly observed natural objects of nature and the world than from any strange, fantastic sphere. For example, he frequently used a house such as Thrae — an 'old stone house in the hollow', 'solemn, secret, strange',¹⁸ as a symbol in his poetry for something or some state of mind left behind in childhood, emotions of nostalgia and regret being evoked by the forlorn and deserted state of the place:

And aloof in the valley, forlorn and gray,
Is a house whence even the birds have flown. 19 (CP426)

While the house itself is an object of solid, everyday actuality, we are reminded at the same time, by its seclusion, of his preoccupation with the solitude which enabled him to visit that other world — his own round tower of imagination and fantasy. In keeping with his vision of the deserted house and the child playing alone in Thrae, many of his poems depict a solitary child:

And I am there alone:
Forlornly, silently,
Plays in the evening garden 20
Myself with me. (CP97)

He once said to Brain, 'Do you prefer to look at people or solitude? I prefer solitude'.²¹ Such a remark inclines one to believe that his poem 'A Recluse' might be a picture of himself:

Here lies (where all at peace may be)
A lover of mere privacy.
Graces and gifts were his; now none
Will keep him from oblivion;
How well they served his hidden ends
Ask those who knew him best, his friends.

He is dead; but even among the quick
This world was never his candlestick.
He envied none; he was content
With self-inflicted banishment.
'Let your light shine!' was never his way:
What then remains but, Welladay! (CP473)

Again and again in de la Mare's work we see that it is the inward, solitary, imaginative journeys of the mind which are important to him. He said: 'our one hope is to get away from realism in the accepted sense. An imaginative experience is not only as real but far realer than an unimaginative one'.²² The symbols of those journeys of the mind — the traveller and the quest — are to be seen everywhere. They are fully and clearly developed in his long poem *The Traveller*, with its echoes of the various quest poems in English literature.²³ But there are many other hints of this theme in his work like, for instance, the mention of Nahum's travels and Simon's 'journey that has not yet come to an end'.²⁴ Very often too the theme appears in his short stories, as in 'Pigtails, Ltd.'. There we read that Miss Rawlings, even when she had collected thirty little ten-year-old girls 'with the three-cornered faces, high cheek bones, "really" brown eyes,

and truly appropriate pigtails' she had been searching for, who seemed to match up to the picture of her imagined lost "Little Gal" Barbara Allan, yet 'in the very secretest corner of her heart of hearts she was still looking for the one and only absolute little Barbara Allan of her lifelong daydream'.²⁵

At the same time, it is clear that de la Mare realised that the traveller in the world of the imagination must also come to terms with realities, must live in the actual world too. For, although in his own autobiographical poem 'A Portrait' we find the words, 'the imagined is the breath of life',²⁶ he also wrote in his essay on Rupert Brooke:

The visionaries, those whose eyes are fixed on the distance, on the beginning and end, rather than on the incident and excitement, of life's journey, have to learn to substantiate their imaginings, to base their fantastic palaces on *terra firma*, to weave their dreams into the fabric of actuality. But the source and origin of their poetry is in the world within. ²⁷

He was indeed a dreamer and a visionary, but he did not stand aloof from the practicalities of life. 'Avid for fantasy — yet how staid a head' he wrote of himself;²⁸ and anecdotes by friends show that he was a practical and conscientious worker in everyday life.

In his poetry too the ordinary things of life were for him 'usual yet miraculous' ²⁹ and he could describe these wonders in the simplest everyday words, as in the short poem 'Seeds' :

The seeds I sowed —
For weeks unseen —
Have pushed up pygmy
Shoots of green;
So frail you'd think
The tiniest stone
Would never let
A glimpse be shown.
But no; a pebble
Near them lies,
At least a cherry-stone
In size,

Which that mere sprout
Has heaved away,
To bask in sunshine,
See the Day.

(CP268)

It is in a poem like this that we see de la Mare's genius for making the most familiar event take on the unfamiliarity of a miracle, the prosaic become the poetical under the influence of an imaginative mind in collaboration with an expert linguistic technique. He had a feeling for the exact and evocative word, shown here for example in the use of 'pygmy shoots', 'frail' and 'tiniest' combined with 'sprout' and 'heaved' with their contrasting connotations of weakness and strength.

De la Mare's fascination with the miracles of Nature, which is seen in such a poem as this, is revealed in a few lines in *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe*: 'Merely to be alive, indeed, is adventure enough in a world like this, so erratic and disjointed; so lovely and so odd and mysterious and profound.'³⁰ This joy in nature and the wonders of creation, tempered though it is by melancholy and nostalgia, and his inveterate questioning in face of the mysteries of birth and death is, perhaps, the autobiographical secret of his life. In *Memoirs of a Midget* he wrote: 'I had the clouds and the water and the insects and the stones — while pimperl, mousetail, tormentil, the wild strawberry, the feathery grasses seemed to have been made expressly for my delight'. Later, his tiny heroine 'wondered how it was that we human beings can bear even to go on living between two such mysteries as the beginning and the end of life.'³¹

Such revelations of his way of looking at life, found throughout de la Mare's writings, are all we have of autobiography, for although he

told Brain once that he had been contemplating writing his memoirs, he never did.³² Discussing autobiography once, he wrote:

Few of us perhaps are keenly self-conscious or mind-conscious, or acutely curious concerning the inner workings of the mind, senses, intellect, memory and so forth. What am I? Whence am I come? Whither am I going? What *is* this place? Are these things *real*? What is the precise relation between myself and the not-self? Was I always, shall I be for ever? *Can* I be merely of the Now? Such questions as these are perhaps brooded over more frequently than we suspect. But in general they are asked in private, and adjourned.³³

Walter de la Mare constantly asked such questions, not in an autobiography, but in his poetry and prose, and although the whole truth about him may be beyond our scope, obviously we can see the bent of his mind in his books and especially his anthologies. There is his preoccupation with dreams and sleep and death, imagination and the unconscious, revealed for instance in *Behold, This Dreamer*;³⁴ his interest in the nature of love in *Love*;³⁵ with childhood in *Early One Morning in the Spring* and in his books of poems, anthologies and stories for children;³⁶ his love of reading, literature and solitude in *Desert Islands*; his love of nature and animals in his many animal poems and his anthology of *Animal Stories*.³⁷

But also, even in his more ephemeral writings — for example, in the small compass of his article 'My Mind to me . . . ' (mentioned earlier) — we must be on the *qui vive*, ready to perceive de la Mare's expression of the mainsprings of his poetry. Here we can find hints and suggestions about what might have gone into his autobiography had he written one — the story not only of his external life, but also the life of his mind. In this short article he touched briefly on the literary authors he knew and liked — Blake, Shakespeare, Coleridge, Milton, Dante, Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Shelley, Lewis Carroll, Wordsworth, Beddoes, Vaughan and Poe; and he showed his knowledge and

love of the Bible and of 'Nature and her exquisite handiwork'. At more length he wrote there on the importance to a man of memory and imagination:

If he retains in lively activity his seven senses and his five wits, then *all* his mind will be the least of it he will need; and especially a rich and ready memory and, for starry zenith, an imagination which bestows on him a universe compared with which the round world itself, safely circumnavigated, will prove to have been but a bubble — however lovely, iridescent and inexhaustible;

and on his preoccupation with the nature of death:

We may even taste, it may be, of an order of existence that may be awaiting us after the last journey of all, a journey, perhaps, often obscurely contemplated, but whose goal evades us.

He revealed too his sense of the unreality of man's concept of time and space:

Moreover, the travelling mind moves, like that which gave it being, in a mysterious way. Its caprices are unpredictable, its rapidity is Ariel's, its geography chaotic. It cannot be said to mock at time, since of time, for the time being, it is unconscious; and therefore space almost ceases to be. We can hardly be said to be engaged in travel, since, apparently, a moment or two *before* even we asked for our ticket, we have found ourselves already there!

And he preached the necessity for the 'seeing eye':

Yet let the meditative eye rest but for a moment on the most familiar of objects in the most familiar of rooms, the image thus welcomed may transport the self within into regions not of the bygone or the might-have-been, but of the *is* or the never-to-be; and that perhaps a radiant one.

And again:

A twilight expedition even to the nearest pillarbox may present another order of traveller with an evening star that seems in its serene and solitary beauty to have been awaiting the assignation until that very moment; with a common bird, the meaning of whose cadences his ear had never really caught before; or with a wild flower until that moment never *seen*; and, perhaps, even with an Idea! It is not distance that counts, or hope, or even longing; but the mind's looking-glass, which not only reflects but transmutes to its own purposes all that it receives. 38

Richard Church noted this important image in de la Mare's work — the mirror. He describes how the central figure in de la Mare's novel

The Return looks at himself in the mirror and 'sees a face only dimly, historically, resembling his own'; and says of de la Mare that he, in the same way, turned 'to the mirror to look out on life in reflection, in opposites'. This capacity for seeing life as if in a mirror image which blurs reality, seemed to endow him 'with several sets of eyes, which he was able to set out in strategic positions to get a many-intelligenced view of any given situation, mood, fear or passion, person, or place'.³⁹ Thus, as Ralph Lawrence said, the 'essential ordinariness' of his subject matter is transmuted by 'a twist, a shifting of the view-point, a modification of the approach'.⁴⁰ We know that this image of the mirror preoccupied de la Mare, for he said to Brain: 'has it ever occurred to you that the mind may be like a mirror, reflecting the outside world — sometimes rather unflatteringly?'⁴¹ And the image is repeated many times in his poems, for example, in *The Traveller* :

Beneath him an immeasurable well
Of lustrous crystal motionlessly black
Deeped on. And as he gazed — marvel past words to tell —
It seemed to him a presence there gazed back . . .

And in its midst a mote scarce visible —
Himself: the momentary looking-glass
Of Nature, which a moment may annul,
And with earth's hosts may into nothing pass. (CP515,vi,ix)

De la Mare's feeling that the life of the imagination was more exciting than the life of the real world, and that that world might be in a philosophical way unreal, even a dream, was perhaps the reason why he did not feel much need to write about contemporary life as, for example, Wilfred Owen and the other war poets did when they wrote about the horrors of trench warfare, or T. S. Eliot of the disillusionments of the post-war world, or Auden and his contemporaries of the

political upheavals and social problems of the thirties. He found interest and pleasure and excitement in his travels in the looking glass of his own mind and imagination, in his contemplation not only of everyday happenings in the world of reality, but also of the mysteries of Nature, life and death, and the mind and imagination of man.⁴² He has often been accused by critics of turning away from life — of escapism — but surely this preoccupation with man's inner life can only be called escapism by those who are bound up with the material world to the exclusion of the spiritual and mental side of life, which many imaginative people — visionaries, holy men, artists and poets — have thought of as man's real life.

We must use Walter de la Mare's writings, therefore, as our looking glass into the secrets of his travels. Some of the signposts I hope to illuminate by extracts from his own non-fiction prose works and by analysis of his poetry and, where relevant, his fiction. But, first, it may be helpful as a base for these studies to look at what little is known at present, publicly, of his life, and to describe his literary background.

* * * * *

(2) BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Walter John de la Mare (known as Jack to his friends) was born in the village of Charlton, Kent, on 25 April 1873.⁴³ He was the sixth child of James Edward Delamare (1811—1877), an official of the Bank of England, who was sixty-two when he was born. The family was of Huguenot descent. Mégroz goes into some detail about their genealogy.⁴⁴ Apparently he had been shown documents which traced the de la Mare ancestry back to a Huguenot Nicholas Delamare, father of the

Jean Baptiste Delamare who arrived in England in October 1730; and he mentions a Peter, born in 1769, who was the head of a firm of silk weavers in Spitalfields. Mégroz also gives details about de la Mare's family on his mother's side where there was a connection with the poet Robert Browning. She was Lucy Sophia Browning, a daughter of Dr Colin Arrot Browning, naval surgeon at Woolwich Dockyard.⁴⁵ Dr Browning was an author in a minor way himself, having written two books about the convict ships to Australia — *England's Exiles* (1842) and *The Convict Ship* (1843).⁴⁶ Walter de la Mare's maternal great-grandfather (Dr Colin Browning's father), was a minister at Arbroath in Scotland, so he had both Scottish and French blood in him. He had an uncle, the Reverend Abraham Delamare, rector of the church he built himself, St Thomas's Woolwich, where Walter's father was churchwarden. In *Early One Morning* de la Mare wrote about his mother's brother, Uncle Herbert Browning, who appeared to have been quite a character, and 'to whose memory in my childhood I was devoted, though he had died young many years before I was born'.⁴⁷ According to Mégroz, there was also an aunt, a Miss Delamare who lived with Abraham, and it is probable that many of the grown-ups de la Mare met must have seemed very old to a small boy born when his father was in his sixties. De la Mare told Brain that he had an aunt born in the eighteenth century, and he seems to have memories of 'gentle and faded old ladies' which perhaps accounts for the large number of elderly ladies who appear in his poems and stories, for example Miss Loo, Miss Duveen, Miss Seaton, Miss Jemima, Jean Elspeth and Miss Miller.⁴⁸

Mégroz's information about the de la Mare family is supplemented by Charles A. Wood's description of the houses where Walter lived as

a child. Apparently Wood visited Charlton in the 1960s and found the original old part of the village and the later Victorian houses engulfed by London. Many of them, now surrounded by a council estate which had sprung up on the once green Fair Field, had become dilapidated. Walter was born in No. 41 Maryon Road (later No. 83), one of a row of these genteel, Victorian, semi-detached houses demolished in August 1966 under a Local Clearance Order.⁴⁹ The house was nearly opposite St Thomas's Church in whose graveyard Wood found an ancient headstone bearing a winged cherub's head, which de la Mare must have seen as a child — an image which he used in his poetry later:

Half-hidden in a graveyard,
In the blackness of a yew,
Where never living creature stirs,
Nor sunbeam pierces through,

Is a tomb-stone, green and crooked —
Its faded legend gone —
With one rain-worn cherub's head
To sing of the unknown.

50

(CP118)

Walter de la Mare's father brought his family to No. 41 Maryon Road in June 1861, but Walter only lived there for a few years for, in 1877, when he was four, his father died.⁵¹ In 1878 his mother went to live at No. 5 Bovill Terrace, Forest Hill (later 61 Bovill Road), moving again in 1889 to 65 Hopton Road. Wood describes Bovill Road as a grim, long Victorian street with tiny back gardens; but, at the end of the last century, there had been the green 'Hilly Fields' and the meadows of the Ravensbourne where Walter and his younger sister could play. Leonard Clark tells us that, because his father died when he was so young, the maternal influence on Walter was very strong as he was, of course, brought up by his mother Lucy, to whom he was evidently devoted.⁵² From her Clark suggests he heard the nursery rhymes, old legends, fairy tales and

traditional poems which he loved and which so clearly influenced his poetry.

De la Mare was educated at St Paul's Cathedral Choir School (1883—89) and Mégroz gives a detailed account of how he founded there in 1889 *The Choristers' Journal*, the school magazine. Mégroz quotes some amusing examples of his journalistic efforts, for many of the contributions in the first six months must have come from his pen, and he comments on 'the practical ability of the poetic mind' shown by the advertisement put in the Journal for 'de la Mare's marvellous low-priced sheet of rare foreign stamps'. In the tenth issue of the magazine (April 1890), under the heading 'School Chat', comes the notice that 'de la Mare, the boy who first thought of *The Choristers' Journal*, is [*sic*], we are sorry to say, left'.⁵³ De la Mare was apparently also, besides being a good scholar, good at games, for we are told that at school he won two cricket bats.⁵⁴

In spite of the fact that he was academically successful at school, he did not go to University, but entered the City office of the Anglo-American (Standard) Oil Company as a book-keeper, a practical, down-to-earth job which seems strangely out of keeping for this poet of imagination and fantasy. But Mégroz quotes him as saying once, when asked if he did not find this office job 'distasteful': 'I think one can find an interest in any task which has *got* to be done'.⁵⁵ Indeed, his career at school (in his work, play and the management of the school magazine) and later in his job, shows a capacity for dealing with practical affairs which contrasts strongly with the often-quoted criticisms of him as being only a dreamer who evaded reality. In fact, he told Russell Brain that 'most people would regard "poet" as a term of abuse,

and poets as impractical people; and yet one could think of half a dozen poets who had obviously been men of great general ability, for example Shakespeare, Milton, Marlowe, Wordsworth, Coleridge'.⁵⁶

For nineteen years until 1908 de la Mare worked as clerk and statistician at the Oil Company, but all the time he was writing in his spare time. For, as he described in 'I Became an Author', as a child he took a great delight in words:

Sound and meaning soon become inseparable; and thus words themselves become the means of make-believe — one of the richest of human consolations; of silently talking to oneself — one of the closest of all human communions; of sharing that self with others; and, last, of making things up — fashioning secret lairs, havens, windows, to rejoice and pacify the fancy, the spirit and the imagination.⁵⁷

His first recallable original scrap of verse was about the rout of Pharaoh's horsemen in the Red Sea, in anapaests, and he always had 'an itch to write so pertinacious' that he was 'compelled to share his treasures'.⁵⁸ His early short stories written in the later nineties were full of fantasy, being perhaps an escape from his workaday world, as Willem van Doorn suggests.⁵⁹ He himself said that writing may be a compensation, 'certainly an escape from self — but into another self', hence the use of a pseudonym and secrecy.⁶⁰ He apparently also edited and wrote a house organ, although it survived for only two issues, and he began to think of himself as a poet, wearing a velvet jacket and keeping his hair long and wavy.⁶¹ His first published work appeared (under the pseudonym Walter Ramal) in 1895 — a short story 'Kismet' — in *The Sketch*. Reid tells us that his first published poem was 'Lullaby'.⁶²

In 1899 de la Mare married Constance Elfrida Ingpen whose brother Roger married his sister.⁶³ It was through this brother-in-law who

gave the manuscript of his story 'A Mote' to St Loe Strachey editor of the *Cornhill* to read, that that magazine began to print his work, publishing 'A Mote' in 1896. Forrest Reid wrote of this story: 'We are conscious of something entirely fresh, distinctly strange, rather whimsical perhaps, and rather baffling' — an opinion which was to be echoed and re-echoed about his writing in general by later critics. His first book to be published was *Songs of Childhood* (1902), also under the name of Walter Ramal. Reid said of it:

It still seems to me a marvellous first book, filled with a romantic beauty, innocent and happy even in its more pensive moments. Moreover, its beauty has proved lasting, and we can, I think, find in it the first hints and stirrings of a great deal that has followed. It is too easy to call it fantastic, for when all is said one of its rarest qualities is its truth.

Reid, rightly I think, quoted 'John Mouldy' as being typical of the 'fresh, distinctly strange' approach of this new, young poet: 'It is horrible and it is beautiful, and the beauty is like a flickering, zig-zag play of lightning by which we see the horror. There is a stark intensity in its realism'.⁶⁴ The book was kindly and perspicuously reviewed by Andrew Lang: 'Try "The Buckle": it is like the vague reverie of our childhood long ago, "the key of the happy golden land"'.⁶⁵ And, reading 'The Buckle', as Lang suggested, one is struck by that line in the last stanza, 'I laughed it near the wall', as having a strange, unusual poetic quality.⁶⁶ It is simple, yet curiously suggestive, a quality which one finds again and again in de la Mare's verse, as for instance in the little epitaphs in *Ding Dong Bell*.⁶⁷ Take 'Richard Halliday':

Each in place as God did 'gree
Here lie all ye Bones of me.
But what made them walke up right,
And, cladde in Flesh, a goodly Sight,
One of hostes of Living Men —
Ask again — ask again!

(CP755)

An example of this pithy yet allusive quality in his children's verse is
'Alas, Alack!':

Ann, Ann!
Come! quick as you can!
There's a fish that *talks*
In the frying-pan.
Out of the fat,
As clear as glass,
He put up his mouth
And moaned 'Alas!'
Oh, most mournful,
'Alas, alack!'
Then turned to his sizzling,
And sank him back. (CP138)

Many critics since the publication of *Songs of Childhood* and de la Mare's other books of verse for children, have agreed that he is one of our greatest writers of children's verse. His poems for children are imaginative but unsentimental, simple and child-like but not childish, and they are 'interwoven with adult subtlety and profundity'.⁶⁸ They can therefore be read with pleasure by adults also, though those adults must be of an imaginative bent of mind. It is true that some of the poetry (especially the early poetry) may, with its over-use of archaism and poetic diction, seem merely affected and even silly as is, for example, a poem entitled 'Peak and Puke' quoted by a reviewer of *The Complete Poems*, which begins:

From his cradle in the glamourie
They have stolen my wee brother,
Housed a changeling in his swaddlings
For to fret my own poor mother.
Pules it in the candle light
Wi' a cheek so lean and white,
Chinkling up its eyne so wee
Wailing shrill at her an' me. (CP176)

It was this kind of verse which prompted him to the following acid criticism:

His adjectives were dim and wan and thin and faint and wee, his substances were such as foam and ivory; shoon attached itself to moon,

ghosties, gnomies kept company to sounds of lute and jargonings, with beautiful ladies in cramosie, in a mist of glamourie, among fields of rosemary, tansy, pimpernel, asphodel and eglantine, though witches at hand might be infusing divale. 69

But de la Mare's verses and tales were aimed essentially at the unusually imaginative man with something of the child still in him, as he himself made clear in his Introduction to *Henry Brocken* (1904), an introduction which was apparently never printed:

I will but describe as best I can the land to which Happy Chance has conducted me, and wherein it seems Happy Chance means to keep me . . . No traveller is welcome here that comes not with an open heart, at least the remembrance of childhood in his mind, and a pocket careless whether it be full or empty. All I find are in some wise children here. None is the slave of habit, none of withered fact. Bohemia may quite easily become a seaport here, and never a wiseacre will so much as blink his eyes. Here often sprouts mistletoe upon the oak. 70

The last few sentences of this quotation effectively answer a critic such as Robert Graves who scornfully criticised de la Mare's poem 'Arabia' because its statements were not sufficiently factual. 'If we are to trust travellers', he wrote, 'there are no shades in Arabia at noon except during sand-storms. There are no forests. The moon and stars are not visible at noon either there or anywhere else south of the Arctic Circle'.⁷¹ Critics like this seem to lack that imaginative faculty which allows a man to ponder on the mystery that lies behind life, and encourages him to speculate on the possibilities of a life quite different from what we think of as actual life, and the strange manifestations such a life might take on, so that there would be nothing at all uncommon, as de la Mare said, about 'the cuckoo calling hollowly cuck-oo to me across a pool thick and still with ice and banked with untrodden snow'.⁷² Or possibly Graves was allergic, as so many critics were in the pro-modernist atmosphere of the time, to what he considered a 'dead movement' — the romantic and impressionistic Georgian poetry which contrasted so strongly

with the more up-to-date poetry of the T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound school.

De la Mare felt that in these early years up to 1908 he had 'failed as a *writer*', for his financial takings had amounted to a deficit occasioned by his purchasing the copyright of two of his books for £20, and he dared not give up his office job for a writing career because he had a wife and family to support.⁷³ It was Sir Henry Newbolt who supplied the solution. Newbolt had become interested in de la Mare's work, encouraged him and suggested that he should become a full-time, free-lance writer. De la Mare's agent had sent his 'Characters from Shakespeare' to be considered for publication in the *Monthly Review* under the pseudonym Walter Ramal, and Newbolt had been sufficiently impressed by them to find out who the author really was. He published the poems in the May issue of 1902 and describes how he at last met the poet: de la Mare walked in on him at Albemarle Street,

and took my hand with a grip which has never loosened in the thirty years that followed. What have we not done together in those years? We have stayed with one another, we have worked together, we have played together (bowls for choice), we have been in Italy together, we have written more letters to each other than any two men I ever heard of, we have seen first our children, and then our grandchildren, growing up as friends. I may even say that we have faced a great crisis together, for in 1905 de la Mare accepted my urgent advice that he should leave 'Oil' — the service of the Rockefeller Standard Oil Trust — and enlist as a writer for whatever his country might be willing to give him. To lessen the risk I asked the Prime Minister, through his secretary Henry Higgs, if he could nominate the most promising poet of the time for a Civil List Pension. The reply was that to pension a man of thirty-three was an expensive undertaking, as had been proved by the case of Tennyson: but Mr. Asquith would ask for a donation from the Royal Bounty. This was in fact obtained and handed over to me in trust to make the best use of it for the poet's benefit. It actually sufficed to change the whole situation, for before I paid over the final instalment de la Mare was receiving for reviews in *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Westminster Gazette* more than four times the amount of his salary as statistician to the Oil Trust, and — more important still — his time was at his own disposition and the credit of his work was cumulative. 74

So, with this small pension of £100 a year, de la Mare took the

very difficult decision to give up his job and in 1908 he retired to Anerley in South London which was then still on the fringe of the countryside. He had 'finally embarked upon a sea of ink'. This was the beginning for him of 'what has proved a life-long craving, past explanation and even yet unexhausted'.⁷⁵ To make a living he turned to free-lance literary work, mostly reviewing in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Bookman* and *Times Literary Supplement*.⁷⁶ In his reviews he showed the same attention to practical detail and the conscientiousness which he had shown in his long years of office work and in the editorship of his school magazine. Mr Richard de la Mare, when asked if his father had disliked reviewing, wrote: 'I don't think so — he certainly took infinite trouble over what he did'.⁷⁷ Luce Bonnerot, however, quotes from a letter to Louis Bonnerot from de la Mare in which he said: 'For years I reviewed books and although it is a pleasure to get anything one is doing, done, I never more than heartily disliked it. Yet I love criticising, analysing, unravelling and the rest'.⁷⁸ Richard Church wrote of his 'vast and anonymous critical work', and St John Adcock remarked on his 'fine critical faculty' and 'his distinction of style'.⁷⁹ This practical side of his nature was illustrated by Sir Stephen Tallents's description of his industry and accuracy and 'unexpected liking for arithmetic' when working with him during World War I in the Food Controller's office on the drafts of the voluntary sugar rationing scheme.⁸⁰

De la Mare must have had quite a difficult time financially before the war when he first gave up his job. Later, however, he benefited from the success of the anthologies, *Georgian Poetry*, to which he contributed, and from the will of Rupert Brooke who had bequeathed to him,

with Gibson and Abercrombie, his author's rights. Edward Marsh tells us that de la Mare eventually made more money out of his appearance in *Georgian Poetry* than from all other publications of his verse put together.⁸¹ In 1914 Marsh, believing de la Mare to be in financial straits, wrote offering his help, but heard from de la Mare that the difficulty of his position had been exaggerated. He relates an anecdote which throws a light on the poet's modesty:

The elder poet was apparently incapable of regarding himself as worthy the notice of a good Samaritan. It may have been at this time that he glanced casually at a letter which had been sent to him in error, saw that it was a charitable appeal on behalf of some literary personage, overlooked the fact that it referred to himself, and sent it back with a pound note and an apology for the smallness of his contribution.⁸²

Although de la Mare led an apparently uneventful life, these years must in fact have been interesting and exciting times for him, for the world of literature, with its animated discussions with literary colleagues and friends, was opening up before him. Although he was a retiring man, he was a sociable recluse and could be found at literary clubs and dinners among his many friends, for he had become sufficiently well-known as a writer to be accepted into the group of Georgian poets who were active at the time. Marsh describes how 'the "Georgians" who lived in London, or happened to come up from the country, foregathered incessantly, lunching or dining in little Soho restaurants, often in company with other writers, painters and so forth'.⁸³

It was during these years too that he formed the long passionate friendship with Naomi Royde-Smith, which lasted from 1911 until about the end of the First World War and was really the chief instance in his life of poetry growing out of personal events. She really was his Beatrice during this period. They met when she was publishing his contributions to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (she was literary editor); fell in love; and spent a tortured decade. She wanted to marry him, but he was unwilling to break with Elfrida, chiefly for the sake of the children. She was never his mistress, but the affair went about as far on the emotional level as it could.⁸⁴

We know from de la Mare's anthology *Love* how important love was to him: 'without love any acme not only of happiness but even of understanding is unattainable'; 'what else in human life, in all its fulness and inexhaustibility, can be compared with it?' ⁸⁵ There were apparently other emotional attachments in his life, a concomitant perhaps of his imaginative and romantic temperament. ⁸⁶ He wrote two versions of a poem about his habit of falling in love, 'Never Again' and 'Intermittent Fever', beginning respectively:

Well, if I fall in love again,
God knows, I am a simpleton. (CP653)
and

Heaven help me! I'm in love again;
Befuddled past the wit of man! (CP602)

Both versions end with the lines:

And yet — bright heaven, what else is worth
A single hour with her on earth?

The life de la Mare led therefore, though undramatic, was rich and full. He loved nature, his books and music and his many friends. His family life was also very dear to him — he had four children and eleven grandchildren, and his affection for children is reflected in many of his poems, for example 'Afraid':

Here lies, but seven years old, our little maid,
Once of the darkness Oh, so sore afraid!
Light of the World — remember that small fear,
And when nor moon nor stars do shine, draw near! (CP357)

In those four lines all his tenderness is reflected. And, all this time, he was writing. He wrote stories, novels and poems. He contributed introductions and prefaces to over sixty books by others. He lectured and wrote articles and reviews for the journals. And he compiled his original 'erudite and entrancing' anthologies. ⁸⁷ 'If he had never done anything else', wrote Priestley, 'but these unique

selections and commentaries, bringing into existence a new and delectable kind of book, Walter de la Mare would deserve our admiration and gratitude'.⁸⁸

After the publication of *Songs of Childhood* in 1902, came *Poems* in 1906, *The Listeners* (1912), *Motley* (1918), and *The Veil* (1921), which brought him general recognition as a poet. His *Peacock Pie* (1913) for children was very successful and he continued to bring out volumes of verse for children and adults throughout his life. Two long poems, *The Traveller* and *Winged Chariot* appeared in 1945 and 1951 respectively. *O Lovely England* (1953) was his last collection.⁸⁹

He wrote many short stories, some of which were collected later, and he also tried his hand at the novel.⁹⁰ His first published prose book was *Henry Brocken* (1904), which was followed by *The Return* (1910) which won the Polignac Prize in 1911, and *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921) which won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1921. These books, like his short stories, had more in common with poetry than the novel and though *Memoirs of a Midget* and *The Return* were successful in their day, they have not stood the test of time as well as his poems and short stories.

De la Mare, 'a stupidly shy bird that prefers its own small cage', as he described himself, rarely left England, though he paid a first visit to America in 1916 to accept for Rupert Brooke the posthumously awarded first Howland Memorial Prize from the University of Yale, and lectured there.⁹¹ He apparently did not like lecturing, but he used to go to school prizegivings and gave recitations to school children. He would accompany Eleanor Farjeon to school and children's libraries — she to sing nursery rhymes and he to recite his poems 'in a soft almost

inaudible voice'.⁹² G. K. Chesterton tells of a school in the Old Kent Road which he had visited 'where all the little girls preserved a sort of legend of Mr de la Mare, as of a fairy uncle'.⁹³ Children and young people evidently liked him, and he returned that liking. He answered letters from them and was always kind to young writers. J. B. Priestley who was a frequent visitor to Anerley said: 'All of us youngsters delighted in him . . . he was one of those rare persons who never make the young awkwardly conscious of their youth and lack of experience'.⁹⁴

In 1915 de la Mare became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a Professor and, in 1938, Vice President.⁹⁵ He was honoured with the Companion of Honour in 1948 and with the Order of Merit in 1953, and was awarded honorary degrees by the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London, St Andrews and Bristol. He was also made an honorary Fellow of Keble College Oxford in 1949.

Latterly he lived at Hill House, Taplow, Buckinghamshire, spent the war years from 1940 at Penn in Buckinghamshire, and then went to 4, South End House, Montpelier Row, Twickenham, an eighteenth century house overlooking Marble Hill Park. His wife died in 1943. In 1951 after a slight coronary thrombosis, he had had to take to a wheel chair and was looked after by his charming nurse, Miss Saxton: 'assis dans un fauteuil ou dans son lit, entouré de livres et de lettres, il continuait avec ardeur sa vie intellectuelle et spirituelle'.⁹⁶

De la Mare was much loved and respected both as writer and man, as the contributions to *Tribute* show. His friends all loved his conversation too — it was quite 'unlike any other conversation I had ever listened to . . . wayward as the flight of a butterfly' said Brain. He would fly off at a tangent as different subjects came into his head and,

as in his poetry, 'oblique lights shot across the familiar scene'.⁹⁷ Sir Stephen Tallents remembered how in the Food Controller's office they found 'it difficult to follow its birdlike hoppings and perchings', and Priestley commented on his 'fascinating trick of asking odd questions, which gave our imaginations a lift'.⁹⁸ He had a great sense of humour too. Marsh quoted some amusing verses sent to him by de la Mare (referring to the cheques he received from the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies), which have an unexpectedly Cloughian ring:

Alas, these millstones round my neck —
Another cheque! Another cheque!
Refrain, my soul; and keep thee steady:
Strive to be — well — polite to Eddie;
Albeit such offence is rank,
Let him post on — and bust thy bank!
Strive thou with patience to endure
That iterated signature! 99

This was certainly the man who delighted in writing humorous verse and was very proud of his double limericks.¹⁰⁰ Marsh remarked that there was also 'the occasional touch of astringency which gives a tang' — what Brain described as 'the bite' in his talk.¹⁰¹

It is this 'touch of astringency', this 'bite', appearing sometimes in de la Mare's poems, which makes one realise that he was, as Clark said, 'a practical mystic' and not just a poet of fantasy cut off from the ordinary world.¹⁰² 'No great artist ever seemed less troubled by the feeling of remoteness from the common interests', said Mégroz.¹⁰³ Indeed, a man who was merely an impractical dreamer and fantasist could not have written such poems as the colloquial, sinister and satirical 'The Feckless Dinner-Party', or the deceptively simple and down-to-earth 'Miss T.'. ¹⁰⁴ Brain said of his limericks and nonsense rhymes that they are 'too little appreciated. I prefer

it to Lear's, as being more rationally irrational'. 105

Mégroz and other friends bring out another facet of de la Mare's personality — his questioning habit of mind, his almost irresponsible inquisitiveness; and this perpetual questioning even over such mundane things as the 'mince, muffins and muttuns' which turn into 'Miss T.', gives rise to much of the tension in his poetry. 106 Questions are often asked or implied, but rarely are answers given. Consider, for example, 'The Listeners', with its famous opening question, 'Is there anybody there?' (CP126), and his later *The Traveller* and *Winged Chariot* — long, speculative, questioning poems about the nature of life, death and time.

Books about de la Mare contain a number of different photographs varying from the good-looking young poet with an intense and visionary gaze which forms the frontispiece to Duffin's study, to the portrait of the older man by Douglas Glass in Hopkins's monograph. But they all show the 'strong mobile face', the distinguished 'solid-looking head' and the aquiline nose which seem to have impressed those who met him. 107 Clark, Priestley and Chesterton described him as being of 'Roman' appearance. Clark said he had the head of a Roman emperor; Priestley described him as grave and shy, deep-voiced and with a 'massive head and . . . strong and almost saturnine profile. It was the face of a benevolent Roman Emperor', with 'powerful Latin features'. And G. K. Chesterton said: 'he has a dark Roman profile rather like a bronze eagle'. 108

A collection of portraits of de la Mare formed part of an exhibition of his books and manuscripts held at the National Book League in April to May 1956 on the occasion of his eighty-third birthday, when

the extent of his literary work was recognised. Amongst the many manuscripts displayed were some Horn books containing stories compiled between 1897 and 1899, and work notes demonstrating his practice in the craft of words, with tabulated analyses of the techniques of Chaucer, Keats and Tennyson.¹⁰⁹ As Margaret Willy wrote, the exhibition was proof of 'his prolific and exuberant versatility'.¹¹⁰

Just after this exhibition of his works, on 22 June 1956, de la Mare died at his home in Twickenham. The funeral service was in St Paul's Cathedral and was conducted by the Reverend A. Jessop Price, headmaster of St Paul's Cathedral Choir School.¹¹¹ His ashes were buried in the crypt of St Paul's and a memorial plaque to him has been placed there.

In June 1954 de la Mare had suffered another slight coronary thrombosis and Russell Brain tells us in his chapter 'Sweet Bells Jangled' how, with his usual curiosity, de la Mare had examined with intense interest the effects of the resultant damage to his brain: 'He said that it felt as if his brain was composed of lots of little mosaics, and they had been jolted out of place'.¹¹² A month before his death Brain called on him after tea and found him wearing a red and blue dressing-gown and sitting in his wheel-chair before the open window, on one pane of which Laurence Whistler had cut with a diamond the last verse of his well-known poem 'Fare Well':

Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour. Let no night
Seal thy sense in deathly slumber
Till to delight
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing;
Since that all things thou wouldst praise
Beauty took from those who loved them
In other days.

(CP218)

Brain remembered him saying then: 'Surely there is no such thing as *the* truth: what matters is our reactions to all the little truths out there'.¹¹³ Certainly in his poetry de la Mare paid tribute to the beauty of nature which consisted for him, not only of the grandeur of the moonlit skies, but also of the little beauties like the 'smooth-plumed bird', 'the seed of the grass', the 'Traveller's Joy' — all the tiny things of the world which he saw, so often obliquely, as with the eyes of his 'The Fly':

How large unto the tiny fly
Must little things appear! —
A rosebud like a feather bed,
Its prickle like a spear;

A dewdrop like a looking-glass,
A hair like golden wire;
The smallest grain of mustard-seed
As fierce as coals of fire;

A loaf of bread, a lofty hill;
A wasp, a cruel leopard;
And specks of salt as bright to see
As lambkins to a shepherd.

(CP7)

A number of the things de la Mare liked can be deduced from his habit of listing objects; one comes upon these lists often in his prose writings. For example he loved violets and lavender, butterflies and beetles, moles and robins, grass and apples, a rainbow, a hill and the dawn. He included in these lists a very wide range of unexpected loves like gay clothes, laughter, nonsense, London, the railway, cricket, wildernesses and archangels, Chardin's bottle and Tess's shoes, a bullfight, a ballet dancer, a Mozart aria, Milton, bread and butter, the stroke of a clock, a kitchen fire, bed and dreams, an apple pip, a whistle, a skull and a pomander (to quote but a few).¹¹⁴ Such lists of prosaic things associated in one breath with the strange and the beautiful, are typical of de la Mare's enthusiasm for, and love of everything in life. As

he said, no Universe 'can be of much account without a comprehensive consciousness capable of the completest appreciation of it in every detail'. ¹¹⁵ To such intricate and amazing beauties de la Mare had always paid his 'utmost blessing'.

Although de la Mare left no autobiography, he wrote one or two poems of an autobiographical nature — notably 'A Recluse' and 'A Portrait', an ironic picture of himself in old age which provides interesting sidelights on his character and habits:

Old: yet unchanged; — still pottering in his thoughts;
Still eagerly enslaved by books and print;
Less plagued, perhaps, by rigid musts and oughts,
But no less frantic in vain argument;

Still happy as a child, with its small toys,
Over his inkpot and his bits and pieces, —
Life's arduous, fragile and ingenuous joys,
Whose charm failed never — nay, it even increases!

Ev'n happier in watch of bird or flower,
Rainbow in heaven, or bud on thorny spray,
A star-strewn nightfall, and that heart-break hour
Of sleep-drowsed senses between dawn and day;

Loving the light — laved eyes in those wild hues! —
And dryad twilight, and the thronging dark;
A Crusoe ravished by mere solitude —
And silence — edged with music's faintest *Hark!*

And any chance-seen face whose loveliness
Hovers, a mystery, between dream and real;
Things usual yet miraculous that bless
And overwell a heart that still can feel;

Haunted by questions no man answered yet;
Pining to leap from A clean on to Z;
Absorbed by problems which the wise forget;
Avid for fantasy — yet how staid a head!

Senses at daggers with his intellect;
Quick, stupid; vain, retiring; ardent, cold;
Faithful and fickle; rash and circumspect;
And never yet at rest in any fold;

Punctual at meals; a spendthrift, close as Scot;
Rebellious, tractable, childish — long gone grey!
Impatient, volatile, tongue wearying not —
Loose, too: which, yet, thank heaven, was taught to pray;

'Childish' indeed! — a waif on shingle shelf
Fronting the rippled sands, the sun, the sea;
And nought but his marooned precarious self
For questing consciousness and will-to-be;

A feeble venturer — in a world so wide!
So rich in action, daring, cunning, strife!
You'd think, poor soul, he had taken Sloth for bride, —
Unless the imagined is the breath of life;

Unless to speculate bring virgin gold,
And *Let's-pretend* can range the seven seas,
And dreams are not mere tales by idiot told,
And tongueless truth may hide in fantasies;

Unless the alone may their own company find,
And churchyards harbour phantoms 'mid their bones,
And even a daisy may suffice a mind
Whose bindweed can redeem a heap of stones;

Too frail a basket for so many eggs —
Loose-woven: Gosling? cygnet? Laugh or weep?
Or is the cup at richest in its dregs?
The actual realest on the verge of sleep?

One yet how often the prey of doubt and fear,
Of bleak despondence, stark anxiety;
Ardent for what is neither now nor here,
An Orpheus fainting for Eurydice;

Not yet inert, but with a tortured breast
At hint of that bleak gulf — his last farewell;
Pining for peace, assurance, pause and rest,
Yet slave to what he loves past words to tell;

A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
Who still at western window stays to win
A transient respite from the latening sky,
And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in.

(CP453-54)

'Yet slave to what he loves past words to tell'; 'Ev'n happier in watch of bird or flower', de la Mare wrote, and it is evident from his poetry that what he loved 'past words to tell' was nature and the rural, pre-industrial English landscape. It is this pastoral idealism which placed him at first amongst the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century — that group represented in Edward Marsh's five anthologies of *Georgian Poetry* (1912—1922). For one of their strongest group charac-

teristics, noticeable especially in the later volumes, was their praise of the English countryside. Walter de la Mare was represented by poems in each of these anthologies and was considered 'one of us' by his poet contemporaries. For example, Rupert Brooke in a letter to Marsh said: 'I'm glad Stephens is getting the Academy prize, the *Crock of Gold* deserves it — Stephens, Masefield, de la Mare, *all* G.P.s! Aren't you proud of us?'.¹¹⁶

Practically speaking therefore, he was one of the so-called Georgian poets although historically, beginning to write as he did in the 1890s, he was, as he called himself, really a Victorian.

Christopher Hassall describes how he 'tried very gently to disengage himself' from the last Georgian anthology in 1922:

I am far too old a bird for this new nest. You *must* shed as you go, if you decide to continue, and my hour arrived with No. 3 really. To be in 5 would be monstrous — not only because our friend Walter is a Victorian, but because of all these young things clamouring for admittance. . . . I am quite certain the critics would welcome such removals. 'Old ruts' — can't you hear the echoes? ¹¹⁷

Marsh persuaded him to continue and his poems 'The Moth', 'Sotto Voce', 'Sephina', 'Titmouse', 'Suppose' and 'The Corner Stone' were included.¹¹⁸

But Georgianism was in decline and when it had almost faded from the literary scene de la Mare continued to write, uninfluenced by any of the new poetic revolutions of the next decades, in his romantic yet unique manner until his death in 1956.

De la Mare's verse certainly had many of the Georgian characteristics. Like them he repudiated the didacticism and rant of the Victorians and Edwardians and the academicism of the 'decadents' of the nineties with their Art for Art's sake attitude.¹¹⁹ He had the Georgian seeing eye and love of nature and the English landscape. In a number of poems he followed their new attempts at realism and simplicity of language, even though he also continued to write in an early Yeatsian 'Celtic twilight'

vein. And, like them, he belonged to the Romantic tradition of English poetry rather than to the 'high modernist mode' (as Perkins describes it) of the T. S. Eliot and Pound school (see Note 122).

Yet he seems to stand apart from the other Georgians. The words unique and individual are used about him by critic after critic:

- (i) 'completely individual position among modern English poets'
- (ii) 'unique imagination . . . individual vision'
- (iii) 'a writer of unique vision'
- (iv) 'the curious, unique blend of strangeness, beauty and mystery'
- (v) 'the entirely individual character of his writings eludes definition'. 120

Some critics think he was a central Georgian poet and one of the best of them, while others believe he was not one of them. G. S. Fraser wrote that he 'has an elusive magic and a beguiling remoteness of personality which is far from what we generally mean by "Georgian"'; Katharine Cooke said he was the most unGeorgian of Georgian poets in his attitude to reality; a reviewer of *Private View* remarked that his genius developed aside from the main literary trend of the period and that he was uninfluenced by fashion; and Middleton Murry, a scathing critic of the Georgians, excepted de la Mare from his criticism, as do Robert Ross, Katharine Cooke and others. 121

It is true that, unlike the Georgians, who strove to get away from the old poetic diction, de la Mare often appears to be a poet of an older generation in that he used archaisms, conventional clichés and what were considered outmoded Romantic themes, terms and images. Yet in some ways he was modern as well. Perkins brings out this aspect: De la Mare most shows himself a poet of the twentieth century precisely in his way of using the Romantic mode, which he handles with the self-conscious knowingness that may come at the end of a tradition. On the

one hand, the themes and images of Romantic poetry are what he has to say and the means he has for saying it, both the vocabulary of his imagination and the world it shapes. On the other hand, to this cunning artist they were also a body of conventions and could be exploited with conviction because they were known for conventions. ¹²²

If we read the whole of de la Mare's poetry and, to understand it, we must read it all, not just the anthology pieces, we are struck by his ability to say the old things freshly and to add often a twist and extra insight to their apparently ordinary quality. There is also a strange, eerie, even sinister atmosphere in his two worlds of fantasy and reality which is missing from the conventional Georgian-type poem. To the Georgian simplicity of language and thought he added a musical and intellectual quality which was lacking, especially in the later Neo-Georgians. Perhaps the difference between de la Mare and the other Georgians can be found in his attitude to reality and fantasy. While they on the whole were satisfied with simple facts and nature description, he went below the surface of ordinary sense perception and questioned our whole apprehension of the world and its meaning:

We build up our small-orbited universe of Earth and sea and sky and their inhabitants by means of our physical senses. And of what else besides? Is the imagination compact solely of what has been so devised? Do we not impose on Nature herself — apart from anything that assures us of the divine — fully as much as she confers upon us? Whence comes this except out of the mind and out of the heart that life has given us, wherewith the spirit feels its joys and pangs. ¹²³

But in so far as we do consider de la Mare a Georgian poet, and he is classed as one by most critics, it must be relevant to a study of his poetry to know something of the Georgian tradition and background. Who were the Georgians we must therefore ask, and what did they stand for?

(3) THE GEORGIANS

The term Georgian seems to be so varied in its application that its usefulness is apt to be queried. The usual meaning in the world of the arts pertains to the reigns of the Four Georges (1714—1830) and in this sense, in literature, the romantic poets from Wordsworth to Keats have been called Georgians, just as one may talk about Georgian furniture and architecture. But for any literary critic writing about the twentieth century the term Georgian refers, in one sense or another, to a group of poets who, at the beginning of the reign of George V (1910—1936), became well-known because they contributed to the five anthologies of poetry entitled *Georgian Poetry*, edited by E. M. (Edward Marsh) and published by the Poetry Bookshop from 1912 to 1922.¹²⁴ Just a few among the forty poets represented in these Georgian anthologies were Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfrid Gibson, Walter de la Mare and D. H. Lawrence. The inclusion of Lawrence, whom many see as quite atypical of Georgian poetry, is symptomatic of the controversies and confusion associated with the use of the term in literary circles. In consequence of this confusion, one must consider what definitions of the term, precise or blurred, have been used by critics.

The historical definition. Georgian has been used historically to denote the new young poets starting to write and publish from approximately 1910, a particularly well-known name being that of Rupert Brooke, who played an important part in the inception of *Georgian Poetry*.¹²⁵ The term has also been used to describe some of those poets who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s, sometimes called the Neo-Georgians. It must be remembered however that there were many

different poets writing in the reign of George V who were not typical of what has come to be known as Georgianism — for example, the Imagists, T. S. Eliot and Pound and, in the thirties, Auden and his school. Alida Monro wished that some of the new modern poetry which she included in her anthology *Recent Poetry 1923—1933*, for example that by T. S. Eliot and Auden, could have been included in the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, for she said that 'these are as worthy of the title "Georgian" as any that appeared therein, more especially as the term will in the future be understood to cover a period of years rather than a particular poetic school'.¹²⁶ However, she has been proved wrong in defining the term just historically like this.

The genre definition. The term came instead to be much used to describe a certain literary genre, thus helping critics to differentiate between a pastoral and traditional English school of Romantic origin, and the diametrically opposed revolutionary 'high modernist mode' which had its genesis in a more European tradition.

The anthology definition. Georgian has also been used in a narrower sense to describe the group of forty poets who contributed to the five *Georgian Poetry* anthologies.

None of these definitions is satisfactory in an absolute sense, and critics of course tend to choose a definition suitable to their own approach to the subject. Timothy Rogers, for instance, in his *Georgian Poetry 1911—1922*, had the anthology definition forced on him because his title with its dates is self-limiting. In his Preface he states: 'Georgian Poetry is here taken literally to mean the five volumes edited by E(dward). M(arsh). and published by Harold Monro at the Poetry Bookshop from 1912 to 1922 and "Georgian Poets" those forty poets whom

Marsh anthologised in them'.¹²⁷ The critical articles which Rogers has collected together are (until the last section, 'Later articles'), unavoidably reviews of the *Georgian Poetry* volumes as they appeared, and it is from Marsh's title for his anthologies that the term Georgian Poetry originated. In his Prefatory Note to the first anthology, Marsh wrote:

This collection, drawn entirely from the publications of the past two years, may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another 'Georgian period' which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past.

This narrow anthology definition of Georgian has been on the whole, like the historical definition, rejected by critics. For example, James Reeves in his anthology *Georgian Poetry* uses the genre definition. He omits many of the contributors to Marsh's anthologies whom he thought weak poets, and includes poets who did not contribute, like Housman and Andrew Young who are accepted by many critics as being typical Georgians.¹²⁸ Housman was, in fact, called by Harold Monro the 'spiritual father' of the Georgian movement.¹²⁹ As Reeves says, his collection 'represents a continuous tradition which dates back to the beginning of this century and has continued until about 1950 . . . Among those poets who are central to the Georgian movement at its best were de la Mare, Davies, and . . . Edmund Blunden. No one would seriously dispute that the bulk of their work is Georgian in character: their best poems are Georgian poems'.¹³⁰

Reeves's mention of de la Mare shows how the historical, genre and anthology definitions of the term have become blurred: for Reeves gives to Walter de la Mare (after W. H. Davies) the largest place in his anthology, believing him to be what he considered a typical poet of the Georgian genre. Yet he may also be considered a Georgian poet

under the anthology definition, for he contributed to all the anthologies. On the other hand, as already noted, from an historical point of view he cannot be considered strictly as a Georgian for he was writing as early as the 1890s and continued writing till his death in 1956.

Reeves has been criticised for his definition of Georgianism as a particular type of poetry, for he has chosen for his anthology only lyrics, neglecting entirely the dramatic and narrative poems (for example, Lascelles Abercrombie's 'The Sale of Saint Thomas'), which were included in the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. He is, however, supported in his rejection of such writers as Abercrombie by an anonymous reviewer who listed the *Georgian Poetry* contributors, Sturge Moore, Abercrombie, Bottomley and R. C. Trevelyan, with a non-contributor Binyon, as little-read Edwardians. This reviewer seemed to see the Georgians in a very limited historical framework as a group of poets writing after the Edwardians but destroyed by the War, 'so unlucky in their generation that they never had time to form a common language'. 131

To our modern eyes a genre definition, rather wider in scope than Reeves's perhaps, does appear more consistent than the narrower historical and anthology definitions, for it combines elements of the two. From an historical point of view the first anthology of *Georgian Poetry* (1912) was published at a time of intellectual exhilaration, when there was a general revolt in all the arts against Academicism and convention: when D. H. Lawrence in typically passionate vein burst forth lyrically about 'The Georgian Renaissance': 'The great liberation gives us an overwhelming sense of joy, *joie d'être, joie de vivre*. This sense of exceeding keen relish and appreciation of life makes romance . . . What

are the Georgian poets, nearly all, but just bursting into a thick blaze of being'.¹³² His sentiments were echoed by W. H. Hamilton in rather more banal terms which were, however, fairly typical of the general feeling of the day: 'The humblest reader — the veriest freshman — must feel himself in this Georgian day like a King . . . April, it would seem, has come again to England; on every orchard bough the chaffinch sings'.¹³³ Masefield, who was considered the precursor of the new realism and colloquialism with his seminal poem *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), said of the poets of the time that 'all were in rebellion against the dominance of Tennyson'.¹³⁴ They were reacting against the Victorian and Edwardian traditions — against poetic diction, rant, didacticism and 'cosmic Darwinism'. They wanted to experiment with form and subject; poetry was to be 'brutal', true to life, using the language of men.¹³⁵

But in the later anthologies of *Georgian Poetry*, particularly the last two, the poems began to appear more alike, as if the poets were copying each other. There was a feeling that they were becoming the work of a coterie of poets who had many characteristics in common. The poems were mostly pleasant, quiet, romantic, markedly English, full of pastoral idealism, in traditional forms, easy to understand, and often expressing sentimental feelings about beauty and nature in slight and unemotional, even banal lyrics. The Georgian war poets who had written with a new brutal realism were not represented in the last volume; the 'lady moon' and the pale stars had usurped the stink of the trenches.¹³⁶ The change was noted by a reviewer of *Georgian Poetry 1918—1919*: 'The character of the collection has altered slowly till this last volume is least like the first, in fact, quite different . . . the bulk of the

contents has acquired a strong family likeness'.¹³⁷ Hence the name Georgian poetry came, in the twenties and thirties, to stand for a genre of poetry which was generally despised and critically abused, and this genre definition of Georgianism was used in some histories of English literature, in articles and introductions and books about the poetry of that time, often in contradistinction to the term 'modern' as applied to the school of T. S. Eliot and Pound which was, by contrast, admired. Typically biting is Kenneth Allott's Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse* which takes its tone from Middleton Murry's attack in the *Athenaeum*, T. S. Eliot's 'very clever hatchet job', and F. R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry*.¹³⁸

Fortunately there is no need to describe again the characteristic insipidities of the Georgian poets with their cult of respectability and their pastoral week-end England of trout streams, parish churches, cricket and RSPCA collecting boxes: their influence on later poets has been negligible. 139

Perkins concisely sums up this attitude:

The conventional statement among critical sheep thus came to be: the Modernists had displaced a school of Georgian poets; these poets had been unoriginal and slack in technique, shallow in feeling, slight in intellect; their poetry specialized in insipid appreciativeness, false simplicity, and weekend escapism. 140

This idea that all Georgians were bad poets led other critics to defend the poets they admired by denying that they were Georgian:

Some writers who dislike all the connotations of the word Georgian are at pains to deny this title to any poet of merit who flourished between 1912 and 1922, the years spanned by Edward Marsh's anthologies. Robert Graves, we are assured, was not a Georgian, nor were D. H. Lawrence, Edward Thomas, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Edmund Blunden. Whether or not they appeared in *Georgian Poetry* is, according to such critics, totally irrelevant. What matters is the quality of their work: if it is good it cannot be Georgian; if it is Georgian it must, *ipso facto*, be feeble. 141

So it might appear that after all the genre definition is as unsatisfactory as the historical or anthology definition. Indeed, none

is exactly right. As recently as 1977 G. S. Fraser said that in spite of Ross's *The Georgian Revolt* (1967) and C. K. Stead's *The New Poetic* (1964), there is 'still no general critical or scholarly agreement about what Georgian Poetry, as a movement, stood for or even about who the Georgian poets were'.¹⁴² The very use by Fraser of the phrase 'a movement' is likely to be questioned by many critics who deny that the Georgians formed a movement, school, coterie, or even a coherent group.

To arrive at some reasonable consensus of opinion about the meaning of 'Georgian' in the context of twentieth century literary criticism, it is necessary to study other recent books besides the two Fraser mentions. Valuable chapters on the Georgians are to be found in Press's *A Map of Modern English Verse* (1969), David Perkins's *A History of Modern Poetry* (1976) and, of course, Timothy Rogers's own introduction to the *Critical Heritage* volume (1977).

From the point of view of literary history, Ross's book is extremely useful. His title is an echo from Herbert Palmer's rather diffuse *Post-Victorian Poetry* where, in his chapter 'Prelude to the First Georgian Revolt', he describes how 'round about 1910 . . . it became very evident to the literary public . . . that the first decade of the century had exceptionally blossomed and that a crowd of new poets, some of them exceptionally promising, was assaulting the stronghold of the Victorians', and later: 'there was a community of notes . . . which had little in common with late Victorian poetry or its overflow, the Edwardian poetry, which, constituted a world of revolt . . . in fact it was the beginning of what is known as Georgian poetry — it was the first movement of "the Georgian Revolt"'.¹⁴³

Ross expatiates on this theme and, placing the Georgians in historical perspective, he shows the conditions of birth of the Marsh anthologies; describes the Georgians' poetic temper and the changes seen in their work between 1912 and 1922; and tries to account for the downfall of the Georgian poetic ideal in his chapters 'Decline and Fall' and 'The Failure of Imagination'. He uses Palmer's term 'Neo-Georgian' to differentiate between Georgian poets of the first three anthologies, with their robust poetic realism, and those weaker poets of the last two volumes, 'the Squire—Shanks—Freeman—Turner school — the "poets of the Squirearchy"'.¹⁴⁴ Ross's study is essentially historical and he himself makes no formal critical assessment of the Georgian poets, although he does appeal for the major figures to be re-evaluated:

The Georgian fields have never been really systematically tilled . . . Others who follow will, I hope, turn their efforts towards evaluating the Georgian achievement in the light of our contemporary critical norms; with our perspective of fifty years, it is time the process was begun. But I have attempted little here beyond some of the first, rough historical spade-work. ¹⁴⁵

C. K. Stead, casting a fresh eye on the main body of poetry criticism in the twenties, thirties and later decades, which used 'Georgian' as a term of critical abuse, made the point that, far from the Georgians being, as it was thought, the 'Establishment' against which the progressive modernist school of T. S. Eliot and Pound reacted, they were in 1912 actually themselves reacting against the 'Establishment' represented by the Edwardians.¹⁴⁶ They thought of themselves as revolutionaries and were considered by reviewers of the time as 'dangerous young innovators'.¹⁴⁷ John Press reiterates this:

In the two or three years before the outbreak of the War, the Imagists and the Georgians alike were in revolt against the fag-end of Victorian

rhetoric and the entrenched forces of literary conservatism led by such men as Newbolt, Noyes, Alfred Austin and William Watson.

He gives a balanced review of the Georgians, referring to the 'distorted version' of the literary history of the period which pictures them as facile, sentimental and slight, and like Ross he suggests that they are better poets than most twentieth century critics think:

'The more one studies the Georgians the less inclined one is to write them off as the mediocre upholders of a stale poetic tradition'. 148

While Press believes the major achievement in twentieth century poetry is to be found in the work of Yeats, Pound and T. S. Eliot, he writes fairly about the Georgians, and gives space to the argument that 'the course of true poetry in our century descends from Thomas Hardy through Edward Thomas, W. H. Davies, Norman Cameron, and Alun Lewis, to finish in Graves himself: and that modernism, as Philip Larkin has observed, "is fun no more"'. 149

David Perkins's survey places the Georgians in a more continuous critical, historical and artistic perspective. In Part One he describes the poetry around the turn of the century — the Romantic legacy, Victorian tradition, the 1890s Avant-Garde and Decadence, the Edwardians and what he calls 'The Narrative Protest' of Noyes, Masfield and others. He ties this in, before he comes to his chapter on 'The Georgian Poets', with a 'transition' chapter on 'Craftsmen of the Beautiful and the Agreeable', in which group he places Bridges, Binyon, Housman, Sturge Moore, Bottomley, Abercrombie and Walter de la Mare — the last four, unlike the others, being Georgian poets by virtue of their contributions to Marsh's anthologies. He thus emphasises that 'the currents of tendency in this period were much more confused than

literary history usually suggests'. By showing that the poets in the early *Georgian Poetry* volumes were not only Georgians but late Victorians and Edwardians also, he demonstrates as Press does how the Georgian, unlike the Eliot/Pound school, continued the English Romantic tradition: 'Like the Edwardians, they reacted against the fin de siècle. The poets they looked to for paternal example were the English Romantics, and, among writers nearer in time, Housman, Hardy, Masfield, Yeats, and Synge'. Perkins completes his chapter on 'The Georgian Poets' with the judgement:

Their set of mind was, in a sense, compromising and deliberately minor, unable or unwilling to take major psychological, intellectual, or even technical risks. Compared with the great Modernist writers who followed they were of lesser stature, but they were capable of a civilised, complex balance and charm that has been rare since. 150

Finally, Rogers provides a valuable collection of reviews from the time of the five Marsh anthologies to later reviews and articles up to 1959; a survey of opposing critical attitudes to the Georgian poets up to the 1970s, and a useful list of the forty poets who contributed to the Georgian anthologies. He states in his Preface that his object is 'to trace the history of a movement which . . . came to represent for later generations a literary establishment of the most reactionary kind'.¹⁵¹ Like Ross, Stead, Press and Perkins, he too points out that while 'Georgian' for Marsh had meant new and modern, by 1922 it meant old-fashioned. He also emphasises, like Ross and Palmer, that there were two phases of Georgianism, and that it was the later Neo-Georgians under the conservative J. C. Squire and his *London Mercury*, who battled against the little magazines of the Left (*Wheels*, *Art and Letters*, *Coterie*) and, later, T. S. Eliot's *Criterion*, in the fight

against Modernism in poetry. He makes it clear that the modern critical attitude is that differentiation should be made between the weaker Neo-Georgians and the best Georgian poets and that the latter (amongst whom most critics place Walter de la Mare) should now receive more attention and study.

In the light of these modern critical studies of Georgianism, perhaps it is now possible after all the critical confusion about the term, to come to some conclusion. It may be practicable to agree partly with Katharine Cooke and partly with Perkins. Katharine Cooke opts for Georgian to be seen neither as a strictly historical, anthology nor genre term, but as 'a more or less definite group of poets, working at a particular time and under particular conditions'.¹⁵² Perkins widens the definition: 'If only because it has figured prominently in literary history, the term "Georgian" cannot now be dropped. But it may be used without disparaging implications. It here indicates the non-Modernist English poets who became known just before, during and after the First World War'. He says, however, that the term must still be recognized in literary discussions as referring to 'the poets in these anthologies, to the poets of the decade in general, to a particular group among them, or by loose extension, to poets active roughly from 1900—1922'. He adds in parenthesis that a version of it revived in the fifties, giving some credence to the genre definition, in addition to the anthology and historical definitions.¹⁵³

With this combination of definitions in mind, it seems that Walter de la Mare must be classed as a Georgian in spite of the fact that he is 'different' in many ways. What those ways are will perhaps become clearer in later chapters of this thesis, where an attempt will be

made to discuss his imagery and technique and to analyse his essentially inimitable poetic mode.¹⁵⁴ It is hoped also to confirm by this study of his poetry that de la Mare ought to be grouped with those Georgians whom many critics believe should be rescued from the critical scrap heap on to which they have been thrown since the rise of the 'new criticism' — the critical revolt of the twenties and thirties of this century against romanticism and impressionism, associated with the names of Hulme, Richards, T. S. Eliot, Leavis and Empson. It is my belief that he should be given his rightful place in the history of English literature in the romantic line from Blake, through Wordsworth and Hardy, and continuing on to Edwin Muir, Dylan Thomas and others.

To lay a foundation for such a study of de la Mare's poetry, it is useful to know as much as possible about the workings of his mind, his habits of thought, his views on literature and life. In the following four chapters I have therefore attempted to discover, firstly from a study of his critical reviews and other non-fiction prose writings and, secondly from his poetry, something of his opinions and his philosophy of life.



CHAPTER 2

HIS VIEWS ON LITERATURE: FROM HIS CRITICAL AND OTHER PROSE WRITINGS

'A book springs, like a fresh, impulsive fountain, like a flower on its stem, from a man's self . . . it is . . . a single revelation of the powers and qualities, physical, temperamental, intellectual, spiritual, of its author. And to some minds the discovery of this peculiar and essential personality is the true aim and vindication of the critic.' *

(1) INTRODUCTION

The absence of any extensive body of up-to-date biographical and critical material about such a prolific and (in his time) well-known writer as Walter de la Mare — poet, short-story writer, novelist, anthologist and critic — is astonishing, although it is true that many writers are neglected immediately following their deaths. There is no doubt, however, that de la Mare's critical reputation has been uneven and that he has, on the whole, been undervalued and thrown into the background of literary history since he died in 1956 and, indeed, before that. There has been little in-depth academic criticism except for Luce Bonnerot's detailed and indispensable published thesis *L'Œuvre de Walter de la Mare* (1969). Mégroz and Forrest Reid's books were published when de la Mare was in his fifties and so cover only a part of his work. The later studies and monographs by Hopkins, Clark and McCrosson (already mentioned) were quite slight, as were those of John Atkins and Henry Duffin.¹ There have of course been critical notes and chapters of evaluation in books on English literature; critical reviews and articles in the literary journals; and various essays, introductions and appreciations

over the years. But in the context of modern literary scholarship this is not an adequate body of material when one is seeking to understand and become better acquainted with the poet who published more than one thousand poems and verses in his lifetime, and was a respected, well-known and well-loved man of letters in the first half of the twentieth century.

So it is to de la Mare's own writings that we must turn if we want to know more about the views on art and life which form the background for his poetry and fiction. Even here there is a problem because, except for some of his critical essays and reviews collected in *Pleasures and Speculations* and *Private View*, and one or two long essays and lectures, de la Mare published no considered statements of his own ideas on literature and life in book form, as did for example T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats.² However, buried in the great mass of material which he wrote as a book reviewer for the literary journals (especially for the *Times Literary Supplement*), or in lectures, forewords and introductions to his own and other people's books, can be found his opinions on a great variety of subjects.³ To get a fuller understanding of the man and poet we must, therefore, as Auden said, read everything that de la Mare wrote, even the second best.⁴ We must read not only his stories, novels and poems, but also his critical and non-fiction work and particularly the introductions to the anthologies he created. In these we can find images, ideas and a philosophy of life which recur in all his writings and are invaluable for any study of the man and his work.

In this connection it is encouraging to find that de la Mare himself believed strongly that the artist is revealed in his work and that it should be the critic's aim to discover the secret personality of the artist: 'The faith of a poet is expressed in *all* that he writes'.⁵

But, 'the immortals too often neglect obvious precautions' he wrote, 'they leave their works to posterity, but no "confessions". They lock locks and mislay keys'.⁶ Certainly de la Mare left few overt 'confessions' himself, though he provided a clue to the lack of an autobiography when he wrote:

A poem is so direct an entry into the secret mind of its writer that there is usually little reason or justification for any desire to explore the precincts. If further knowledge of his history and personality is necessary to a true understanding it means that he has left us the task of finishing the unfinished. ⁷

De la Mare repeated in his review articles over and over again this idea that the artist is revealed in his work even though he may try to conceal himself behind his characters: that poems are haunted with the presence of the writer, however much the writer deplores (as did Hardy) the idea that he should be arraigned as A for what another self utters as Z. ⁸

However, de la Mare also said that a man's work does not necessarily provide facts about his life. The whole man is not self-evident in it, and he certainly did not approve of authorial intrusion. 'The greatest works of art are furthest removed from any suggestion of the merely transitory and personal'.⁹ Wagenknecht, discussing this subject, remarked that de la Mare had nowhere gone as far as Middleton Murry in saying that 'to know a work of literature is to know the soul of the man who created it', but it is doubtful if this can be considered altogether true when one looks at the extracts just quoted.¹⁰ The modern critic of the novel would probably disagree, for example, with de la Mare when he writes about books that 'all are so many full-length looking-glasses in which one sees in colour, angle, movement, a kind of composite reflection of their respective authors'.¹¹ Of course, de la Mare was conscious that there are many authors, like Flaubert, Jane Austen,

Balzac, Tolstoy and Henry James who have, on the whole, a more impersonal approach, but he still believed that they cannot help but reflect something of themselves in their work.¹²

In his article on de la Mare as a book reviewer, Wagenknecht briefly summarised many of de la Mare's views, particularly on literature, and revealed the judgements and insights of the poet. He was probably the first to attempt the task of evaluating de la Mare as a critic by identifying and discussing the two hundred and fourteen review articles which appeared anonymously in the *Times Literary Supplement* from 1908 to 1938 from de la Mare's pen.¹³ Wagenknecht says (and it is probably still the case), that de la Mare's work as a literary critic is largely unknown. But in his article he does not attempt a complete or definitive study of de la Mare as a literary critic, but only tries 'to furnish materials for such a study and to break ground for it'.¹⁴ He gives some preliminary general account of de la Mare's criticism and then a more specific consideration of his criticism of poetry and fiction.

I cannot myself make here any detailed study of de la Mare as a literary critic such as Wagenknecht suggests, but I have used this material from the *Times Literary Supplement*, which he has so carefully isolated, to present some of de la Mare's opinions and beliefs. I have added where relevant other material from de la Mare's non-fiction prose writings and have collected together in Appendix I supplementary quotations which amplify and add weight to my own and Wagenknecht's conclusions. Leaving aside the study of de la Mare as a critic, it should prove interesting and helpful for a study of his poetry to have as much background material on his philosophy of life and views on art and poetry as can be gleaned from this field. Perhaps the more his

attitude to life is revealed in this way the easier it will be to understand the meaning of some of those apparently simple poems of his which yet sometimes defy an obvious explanation. As de la Mare himself wrote:

Some poems may always remain difficult; and there are many other things in life and in books that only the wisest can understand. Still, one can at least try to understand, and as a wise friend who loves both poetry and children once said to me, it is often what seem to be the simplest things that most need explaining. 15

It also seems worthwhile to quote de la Mare's own words as much as possible, for his style is rich and full of imagery and, on the whole, very readable, usually pleasantly clear and rhythmical; and there is, unfortunately (as noted before), little of his criticism published in book form and available to the reader. It is true, of course, that by modern standards de la Mare's criticism is seen to be too impressionistic — the style delicate and poetic and perhaps a little over-iced here and there. Sometimes he is betrayed into a vague and floral eloquence such as he so often criticises in others. But possibly this came from haste under the stress of reviewing to order, combined with his natural leanings towards musical and poetic language. But he was an open-minded and deeply-read critic. Luce Bonnerot calls him a poet-critic of conscience and intelligence, but she does note an absence of academic, intellectual construction in his criticism.¹⁶ It is obvious that de la Mare himself did not class his reviewing as literary criticism for, in his introduction to *Pleasures and Speculations*, he wrote:

Of criticism, worthy of the name, there can, alas, be little, if any, in the pages that follow. A large number of them are the outcome of the activities of a reviewer . . . The distinctions between this afflicted and maligned soul and the literary *critic* have been recently explored by Mrs. Virginia Woolf, Mr. Leonard Woolf and Mr. Frank Swinnerton.¹⁷

As might be expected from a poet reviewing primarily works of literature in a literary journal such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the predominate themes of interest in de la Mare's articles are to do with literature and language. But because he was inclined to mix with his criticism discussion of general truths, we can find many illuminating reflections about his outlook on life and death, with an emphasis on his particular interest in childhood, dream and imagination. Also, of course, a writer usually cannot help but show his own preferences when criticising other writers' work. Russell Brain tells us that de la Mare's favourite themes in conversation were poets and poetry; words; the writing of fiction; his own poems and stories; time; memory; childhood; dreams; apparitions; horror; death and the unknown future; the unseen, and the mystery of life.¹⁸ His penchant for these subjects is reflected in his critical writing, which is therefore (as I have said) invaluable material for a study of the man and his work. I have, in the following pages, confined myself to presenting de la Mare's opinions on those subjects which come overwhelmingly to the fore in the *Times Literary Supplement* material. Topics and ideas which are an important part of the de la Mare canon but which are relatively little discussed in the *Times Literary Supplement* articles will be considered in chapters four and five, which discuss his philosophy of life as deduced from the poems, and in Part II, chapters six to eight, on his imagery.

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(2) POETRY

It must always be remembered that although de la Mare lived until 1956 and was connected with the Georgian movement of the early part of the twentieth century, and indeed was considered to be a Georgian, he

was in his twenties and starting his writing career during the Victorian Fin de Siècle.¹⁹ While he is not considered, in historical literary terms, to be one of the nineties poets (Decadent or anti-Decadent), he could hardly escape being influenced in one way or another, omnivorous reader that he was, by the various literary movements of the Victorian age.²⁰ In fact, his formative years were spent in Victorian times. So it is likely that he was influenced in some ways by the Romantic Movement stemming from Wordsworth and Coleridge, by the Pre-Raphaelites, and probably by the so-called Decadents. These latter were aesthetes and rebels against the moral and didactic poetry of writers (like for example Tennyson) of the high Victorian era. They were the members of the Rhymers Club and contributors to the famous little periodicals of the time like *The Yellow Book*. To mention some of the more prominent among them, they were poets like Dowson and Yeats, Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Lionel Johnson and John Davidson. They followed, in most cases, Gautier's idea of 'Art for Art's sake' and Walter Pater, who believed in the idea of Beauty. Their Bible was Pater's book *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, where he demanded, in its famous Conclusion, freedom of subject matter for the artist, and suggested the notion of the amorality of art. He also called for the impressionistic style and musicality in verse.²¹ This was, too, the era of the early psychoanalysts, and writers were attempting to examine their own moods and ideas and trying to come to terms with the unseen reality behind the actuality of everyday experiences.

De la Mare, as an eager young writer, must have known about all these theories and it can be seen from his reviews that his view of art and literature was expressive. He believed, like Pater, in the concept

of beauty and that we should be moved by poetry:

Surely, too, the germ, the impulse, the nucleus of a poem may be a mere snatch of words, a cadence, a chance object suddenly irradiated with beauty or significance, a memory, a gust of regret, passion, the relics of a dream. 22

He thought that the poet should write only when he feels he must and that it is every poet's aim

to express his love, desire, dream, grief or rapture, his sense of an age-long solitude beset by a cloud of witnesses, to bear record . . . to his experience of a strange, absorbing, baffling world, in the briefest and truest terms within his power. 23

Like Pater, he subscribed to the Keatsian concept 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', and the pursuit of the Ideal: 'If the mere semblance of Life as it reveals itself in a flower is so overwhelming in its beauty, what must be the unveiled Beauty?'²⁴ De la Mare followed the nineties poets (and Poe) in believing that language is very important in poetry and that the poet should be careful always to select the precise word required.²⁵ Yet, at the same time, he said that 'the poetry is not in the words: it is in your reaction to them. A sentence is only words arranged in a certain order, but the sentence doesn't create the meaning: you do'.²⁶

De la Mare often stated this idea that it is the reaction of the reader which counts in poetry and that he must be his own Sesame.²⁷ There is a certain ambivalence here in his views on the importance of language. He repeated in various forms that it is 'not what poems are *about* that greatly matters, but their poetry' and how they are written, echoing in this Housman and Coleridge.²⁸ However, he appreciated the need for analysis of a poem as an aid to understanding it but, on the other hand, he also condemned 'the modern craze for analysis':²⁹ 'But of all the rarest things in art, as in nature, the

cry is the same. Pick them to pieces, their beauty has flown with their life'.³⁰ He obviously believed that the connection between sound and meaning is beyond analysis. Sartre expressed this feeling well when he wrote about the poet:

Au lieu de connaître d'abord les choses par leur nom, il semble qu'il ait d'abord un contact silencieux avec elles puis que, se retournant vers cette autre espèce de choses que sont pour lui les mots, les touchant, les tâtant, les palpant, il découvre en eux une petite luminosité propre et des affinités particulières avec la terre, le ciel et l'eau et toutes les choses créées.

Writing in the 1940s, Sartre commented that people think that literature should convey a message; that the poet must not write words without significance or look just for beauty of phrase and image.³¹ But de la Mare showed himself always totally opposed to the moral theory of literature. Moralising and didacticism, he said, is death to poetry: 'A valuable treatise is yet to be written on the dangers of didacticism'.³² He criticised in various reviews Masfield, Whitman, Drinkwater, Fleming and Francis Brett Young for moralising;³³ and he commented that 'poets who, when writing, are too intent upon teaching, are apt to forfeit their rarest poetry'.³⁴ The truest writer, he said, 'tells his tale of wonder only for its own sake, and for *his* own sake. There may be sermons in his stones, but he prefers to leave them there'.³⁵

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(3) WORDS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The two aspects of poetry — its technical ingredients and its 'secret and very self' which eludes us, were discussed by de la Mare in his essay *Poetry in Prose*. In the Conclusion he stressed the need for hard work and craftsmanship in the writing of poetry, a subject which he returned to many times in his reviews. This constant theme

in de la Mare's writings — the necessity for the poet to practise hard in the use of his word-tools — is bound up also with another theme: that the secret and unique personality of any author is revealed, not only in what he says, but in how he says it, that is, in his use and choice of words: 'Words may be disconcertingly faithful messengers. They bring not only a message with them but the ghost of the sender, not only what he said and meant to say, but the degree of energy, feeling and understanding with which he said and meant it'.³⁶

De la Mare told, in a radio broadcast, how he delighted in words as a child and how they never lost their fascination for him even in old age.³⁷ A poet should be 'in love with words', he said;³⁸ and he constantly emphasised his belief that the poet must take care with these words — the tools of his trade — must hone them and ever increase his store:

Chiefly, perhaps, because we suck in our vocabulary with our mother's milk, we may utterly fail to realize that words are the most delicate and most easily blunted tools of any we possess, and that endless toil and effort and circumspection are needed for their efficient use. ³⁹

Unless the memory is stored with easily retrieved words and phrases, racy, resonant and idiomatic, and above all, with such as instantly evoke objects and qualities, and set echoing near and far the secret heights and recesses of the imagination, the mind starves, and the tongue falters for the means to express itself. ⁴⁰

He thought that in an attempt to widen the vocabulary we should use, as well as neologisms, old words and dialect words, and what he had to say on this subject is particularly interesting in view of the criticism which has been regularly levelled at him for the over-use of poetic diction and archaisms. 'To welcome the neologism, to hark back to the bygone, is mere common-sense', he said. We must not become grammar-conscious and word bound. He did not mind those who find in old books 'an occasional charming makeweight in the shape of

some half-forgotten rich and crusted word or phrase'.⁴¹ He commented on the need for renovating the language:

A language stales. Not only new terms for new-found needs — and the imagination to coin them — are required to give it freshness, colour and vivacity, but an abundance of approximate synonyms . . . A word is never dead. Like its maker, it awaits resurrection. Ours the trump . . . a pleasant-sounding old term even in isolation, may act on the fancy like a charm. In collusion with its fellows it resembles an incantation. 42

He believed that the English Bible is a treasury of our language, and that the English dialects are also a rich source of words suitable for enlarging the vocabulary:

Londoners have a way of being scornfully amused at country speech . . . but half an hour with the great *Dialect Dictionary* will prove how inexhaustibly rich the English language once was and still is in words made, used, and loved by folk unlearned in books, but with keen and lively eyes in their heads, quick to see the delight and livingness of a thing, and with the wits to give it a name fitting it as close as a skin. 43

Bound up with this obvious delight in old words is de la Mare's belief in the music of words:

Needless to say we may value poetry more for its ideas, its philosophy, its message, its edification than for the delight which the mere music of its language may bestow. But that music absent, poetry, in the generally accepted meaning of the word, is absent, whatever else may remain.

But he is against words being used for their pleasant sound only:

It is on the effect of its sounds alone of course that the music of a poem depends. But a poem in words depends also for its effect on the *mind* upon what its verbal music conveys — imagery, thought, feeling.⁴⁴

This is also an interesting observation when one considers how often the critics concentrate on the extraordinary musical quality of de la Mare's verse, to the exclusion of more weighty considerations.⁴⁵

They recognise his preoccupation with words and his deep love of the English language and they have also recognised his mastery in the use of that language. Perhaps Luce Bonnerot has best summed up his great command of words when she writes that he was a virtuoso with them:

Le jaillissement verbal chez lui est prodigieux; le poète jongle avec les mots comme avec des boules et des quilles; les mots roulent, s'entrechoquent et se placent miraculeusement à l'endroit prévu. Mots déformés, mots créés, mots étrangers, toute la gamme du burlesque apparaît, avec effets sonores, allitérations, assonances, rimes, rythmes, répétitions, variations savantes. De la Mare est un chef d'orchestre verbal. 46

The hard work de la Mare put into choosing the exact word has been commented upon by Leonard Clark: 'He slogged at words all his life, as hard as any navvy with pick and shovel'; and by Sir Stephen Tallents: 'I have never forgotten the impression which de la Mare's intent pursuit of the one perfect word made on me'. 47

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(4) CRAFTSMANSHIP AND HARD WORK

De la Mare believed that choice of the right word, music, imagery, thought and feeling were all essential to lyric poetry, but he also insisted that metrical craft, economy of means and careful, systematic construction were too of great importance. Hard work and craftsmanship are essential: 'Although the ability to make use of the manifold devices of metre appears to be innate, although a poet is born and is not self-made, the writing of verse is none the less a craft requiring assiduous practice, and an unusual intensity and persistence of impulse'. 48 The poet must be prepared for disappointment and will find to the end of his days that writing poetry is 'grotesquely difficult'. 49 De la Mare greatly admired Chardin and in his monograph on the painter he quoted him as saying that 'no one unaware of the supreme difficulty of art achieves anything worth while'; and 'no work of art that has not involved care and pains is of any value'. 50 With this hard work and craftsmanship should also go, he said, 'an incessant critical activity':

'No uncritical or unanalytical brain ever produced a poem. To make implies choice . . . every work of genius is an indefatigably rational thing . . . Its rapture is as free from carelessness as its circumspection is from craft'.⁵¹

De la Mare's own craftsmanship is never in question. 'Conscientious artist'; 'consummate craftsman'; 'exquisite craftsmanship'; 'extraordinary metrical craftsmanship'; 'extraordinary delicacy of craftsmanship'; such phrases constantly recur in criticism of his work. It is interesting to see, therefore, from his own reviews, what he thought were the important aspects of a poet's craft besides the choice and use of words already noted. As he said, 'to make implies choice', and that meant for de la Mare discarding the inessential.

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(5) CONCISION, SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY

The poet, de la Mare said, 'inasmuch as he is setting his whole mind with an extraordinary intensity on the expression of a thought and feeling . . . must . . . of necessity be rejecting everything that is not essential to that complete expression'.⁵² Economy, concision, restraint and simplicity are vital, and in his best lyrics he followed this rule. Consider, for example, the simple but perfect, highly condensed little epitaphs in his *Ding Dong Bell*. In his reviews he constantly criticised lack of restraint and praised economy:

For the very life of a lyric may vanish at a word too few or too many or false, as swiftly as a butterfly expires upon a pin. ⁵³

The word too many, too emphatic, seductive, will not only blur and dim, but destroy what it is intended to represent. 54

De la Mare loved the simplicity of the old ballads, which he believed were the 'outcome of genuine feeling and imagination', and many of his own poems are ballad-based.⁵⁵ But this emphasis on simplicity in poetry does not mean that he thought the poet should eschew the complexity of inner meaning which may be inherent in the use of imagery and symbol, or that he dismissed more obscure and difficult poetry such as that of Donne. Russell Brain reported that de la Mare said that 'the simple is very complex';⁵⁶ and in *Come Hither* he wrote, about poems, that 'even the simplest . . . may have secrets which will need a pretty close searching out'.⁵⁷

In their discussions on de la Mare, the critics have noted such a 'complex' simplicity in many of his own poems, although he is seldom obscure in syntax. A. C. Ward talks about the 'divine incomprehensibility' in his simple poems; an anonymous critic writes of the depth of suggestiveness in his poetry which simplicity tends to conceal; and W. J. Smith says: 'for all the truly complex nature of his work, he seemed to present no problems'.⁵⁸

De la Mare's own views on the subject were shown in a review article on 'Obscurity and Clarity', where he described the different ways in which a poem may be obscure. The theme may be inadequately expressed or in a needlessly involved fashion; or it may be so remote or alien to us and our experience 'that we cannot imaginatively share it'; and perhaps, in certain mystical poetry, our powers of understanding are at fault.⁵⁹ He was sometimes critical of Yeats and Dylan Thomas, but admired Donne. In a review of Yeats's *The Cutting of an Agate*, he wrote that there seems to be an intellectual veil

between our mind and his — he talks over our heads, his keywords are empty shells, he leaves 'his symbols symbolical and his runes esoteric'.⁶⁰ Talking to Brain about Dylan Thomas, he said that he had once had to adjudicate upon him.

He had read a verse of his, and said it was good, and the other adjudicators said: 'What does it mean?' and he said: 'Does it matter what it means?' He then developed his idea of the impossibility of saying what anything means. You can't put your feelings about a daisy adequately into words. He thought Dylan Thomas's obscurity was probably due to indolence. It is very difficult to make clear what you mean, and, when you've done it, there may not be much to show for it. 61

As for Donne, his review of Grierson's *The Poems of John Donne* shows how he was 'made captive' by the man and the poet:

He may overwhelm a lyric with learning, juggle with the erudite ideas of 'wrangling schooles', be affectedly and fantastically intellectual, tediously labyrinthine . . . but . . . he is always in some indefinable and virtual fashion the man — John Donne. And it is from out of the midst of his obscurity, in the hugger-mugger, as it were, of his alembics and retorts, that we are suddenly dazzled and enthralled by a sheer incandescence of thought and feeling — the attar of his poetry. 62

It is a poetry that awaits the mind as the body grows older, and when we have ourselves learned the experience of life with which it is concerned. 63

Although de la Mare could appreciate Donne's obscure poetry, he was critical of poetry obscure by reason of a manner and language too abstract, flowery and verbose. He criticised 'mere versifiers' who 'elaborate the life out of their work'. He was also critical of defects of technique and construction 'which an inch or two of midnight candle, a few hours hard labour, might have removed'.⁶⁴

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(6) TECHNIQUE

Being a poet himself, de la Mare was bound to be presented with a great deal of poetry to review, and it is not surprising to find him commenting in such articles on various aspects of poetic technique. As

an assiduous craftsman in the art of poetry, he had obviously studied and practised the subject and was able to make pertinent remarks and criticisms, especially on the use of metre, rhythm and rhyme. He believed strongly that 'art completes a pattern' and that metre, rhythm, rhyme and other pattern-forming linguistic devices are needed in poetry.⁶⁵ He felt that there is a physical demand in man for some rhythmical pattern which poetry as well as the other arts can supply:

It is pretty certain that the moment even the most prosy human begins to rail or boast (thoroughly) or make love (articulately) or to give comfort, some ghost of a rhythm enters into his speech; it moves to a kind of tune, lifts to an emphasis, falls into a cadence. All life, all passion, all thought, the very stars of heaven, beat, surge, fly, wheel to some inscrutable rhythm: and lyrical poetry is no less faithful to a hidden law. 66

This idea that the rhythms of language are a part of the physical rhythm of life itself was echoed by the phonetician David Abercrombie who, in writing about the stress-timed rhythm of the English language and English verse structure, said that all rhythms seem to be based ultimately on body movement rhythm.⁶⁷ De la Mare, in a discussion on poetry with Spender, maintained that the richest effect can be achieved in poetry by the use of metre and rhyme.⁶⁸ But, on the other hand,

every metrical recurrence, indeed, by means of varying rhythms, unless it is to dull and deaden the mind, must be continually diversified. A sequence of lines all but regularly metrical is probably the easiest and clumsiest feat of which language is capable. 69

There need be no slavery to rhythm and rhyme, de la Mare thought and, in his reviews, he criticised poets for too much metrical fluency: 'A ten-syllable line that beats to a tattoo is insupportable, but a line that has to be closely scrutinized and adjusted before its rhythms submit to metre at all is a misfortune on the other side'.⁷⁰

As metre makes a satisfying pattern so, according to de la Mare, does rhyme. He believed it 'serves melody, symmetry, balance. It helps to secure in varying degree a formal pattern, stresses a pause, satisfies expectation, and draws meaning together'.⁷¹ Rhyme and various forms of pattern-forming devices certainly seem to have been important to de la Mare in his own work. In nearly all his poems he used pattern in the form of stanza and rhyme, alliteration, repetition, refrain and flexible, subtle rhythms. So it is not surprising to find him criticising John Freeman for awkward inversions, careless constructions and 'rhymelessness where the ear positively pines for rhyme';⁷² and D. H. Lawrence whose poems, metrically formless and unstable, he thought were not verse at all, in spite of his naked sincerity.⁷³ But he was well aware that rhyme must not be forced:

The obligation or choice to rhyme in verse may prove either for a sluggish or a rich mind an aid to the revival, suggestion, or discovery of images and ideas . . . The help that rhyming may give, then, must be set against the difficulty of so persuading the suggested word, together with its *relevant* object or image or thought, into the confines of the poem as not even to hint at the process. Few technical defects in verse are more fatal than forced rhymes. 74

Besides rhythm and rhyme, de la Mare believed that the arrangement of verbal sounds plays a very important part in poetry. A writer needs to have music in his soul, he said. But the effect of verbal sounds is not solely sensuous — they convey 'meaning' too, for no synonym can have precisely the same value as the word it displaces. It would be an herculean task, he thought, to explore fully the connection between sound and meaning, and need the finest sensibility. All depends on the fitting relation between the sound and the sense. Although poetry can be unpleasantly

cacophonous, it can also be 'falsely or cloyingly melodious'.⁷⁵

Reviewing a reprint of Swinburne's *The Springtide of Life*, he said that the poetry had too little prose in it; that it was a 'bodiless vintage, all bubbles and aroma', 'cloying and aromatic', an 'unfaltering melodious gush of words'.⁷⁶ De la Mare's own poetry, by common consent, shows great mastery of the possibilities of sound, but on the whole, though melodious, it is not gushing. T. S. Eliot wrote in his tribute 'To Walter de la Mare' of 'those deceptive cadences' and 'the inexplicable mystery of sound'.⁷⁷

De la Mare is ruthlessly critical in his reviews about the insensitive use of sound. Of John Freeman, for example, he said that although he had an unusual range of thought and feeling, there was much roughness and lack of craftsmanship in his poems: 'Lines are left in what must be their first state, that hiss with sibilants like a nest of serpents or writhe into verbal knots like the locks of Medusa; lines, again, so rebellious in rhythm that their metrical basis is lost'.⁷⁸ And of Gilbert Frankau, there are 'so many sibilants that meaning is partly lost by the difficulty of saying the words'.⁷⁹

As de la Mare reviewed so much poetry, it is possible to catch illuminating glimpses of what he thought constituted bad poetry, and to see through his eyes the weaknesses of various poets. It is also not surprising therefore, when we remember his emphasis on the desirability of concision and clarity in poetry, that we find him criticising poets for using hyperbole, invective, rhetoric, gush, sentiment, too many clichés and too much poetic diction. Alfred Noyes is criticised for vague emotionalism and loose thought, too much repetition, too many rhetorical devices:

His verse eddies and swirls along . . . and at times . . . without any too clear a trace of heed or reflection. Hyperbole — useful enough servant to a poet, but the worst of masters — is second nature to him . . . the bare truth, which he might safely leave to our pity and vision, he makes unreal with fantastic exaggeration. 80

In his review of *An Easter Anthology*, he criticised a poem by Dryden for its 'brisk glibness, the metrical jog-trot, the flimsy exaltation and hyperbole'. In other selections in this anthology he censured 'this feeble and indolent technic, this endless reiteration of unreanimate image and simile — cloud, night, sea, sun — this niggardliness of vocabulary'.⁸¹ Elsewhere he condemned flowery, abstract, empty phrases and quoted some examples: 'And great white clouds went up the stairs of God'; 'And fairies ring their silver bells in wrath'; 'Ah, white Madonna of the ward'; and 'O rose, rose, the joy of love is forever'.⁸²

De la Mare must have encountered much poor verse when he had to review the vast amount of patriotic verse which was published during the 1914 to 1918 war. This kind of war poetry, together with the erotic poetry of passion, he thought were extremely difficult to write successfully. This is interesting in view of the general criticism against him for not writing 'concerned' poetry about the world events going on around him, and for his so-called 'bloodless' love poetry. He said quite clearly however, and relevantly:

Every poet, even the greatest, has a certain clearly-defined range, not only of craftsmanship but of poetic material. He may suffer most things mortal in his life, but he could not make poetry of them all even if he would. To trespass far beyond this sphere of impulse . . . is usually to lose the magic, the genius of which its possessor is, in the act, unconscious. 83

(7) WAR POETRY

In his article 'Poems in War Time', de la Mare wrote that little war-time verse was likely to survive; that the attempt of the poets to speak for the nation and not just for themselves overwhelms the individual imagination, and that rhetoric, invective, lofty aim and the inadequate expression of it is the mark of most war verse, little of which is poetry.⁸⁴ More than enough verse has been written in glorification of war, he said, and much of it is 'windy and flighty, shallow and violent'.⁸⁵

But to us these war-time reviews by de la Mare are interesting because we find in them some autobiographical hints about his attitude to the war. We know from Luce Bonnerot that he admired London's courage in the second World War and felt ashamed at having led such a peaceful life.⁸⁶ There is a personal note, therefore, in his comment that if a poet cannot fight for his country with a gun, he may feel that he ought to do so with a pen;⁸⁷ and again, when he said that to write something about the war is an 'achievement slight enough, that might yet console a man even for his incapacity to take up arms'.⁸⁸ But, in line with his view that moralizing is fatal to poetry, he felt that, to a poet, a sense of duty is dangerous: 'No true poem will spring from this sense of duty'.⁸⁹ It appears as if de la Mare found the war alien to his powers. He believed that the poet needs peace to write poetry: 'True patriotic poetry is as rare as manna and comes we know not whence. And since some tranquillity of mind, some perspective and imaginative reaction are necessary to the writing of poetry, how shall truth and beauty be sung in days burdened with anxiety'.⁹⁰

De la Mare's own war poems were few and only one or two of the less personal ones were really successful, for example, 'Motley', 'An Old Cannon' and 'Israfel'.⁹¹ These poems showed the same horror of war as his reviews, which were couched in rather conventional and emotive terms. Compare, for instance: 'But on those of us who are not soldiers the influence of the war broods like the memory of a nightmare'; 'the evil, monstrous, Satanic horrors of modern War';⁹² and lines from his poem 'The Spectacle':

Scan with calm bloodshot eyes the world around us,
Its broken stones, its sorrows! No voice could tell
The toll of the innocent crucified, weeping and wailing,
In this region of torment ineffable, flame and derision —
What wonder if we believe no longer in Hell? (CP461)

It certainly seems as if de la Mare might have agreed with Yeats who, in his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), wrote that he would not include the war poets because he believed that 'passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'. The fact that it is the realistic and personally-experienced verse of war poets like Owen that has survived, rather than the abstract, romantic patriotic verse of which de la Mare had to review so much, makes his inability or refusal (call it what you will) to write any considerable amount of war poetry more logically understandable, as he was not himself a participant, and knew nothing first-hand of 'death in the foulness of "the front", horror, fear and agony'. But he was very much against the idea of hiding and hushing up 'the reality beneath this shimmering, romantic veil of the ideal' which was behind so much of the war poetry, at least in the early days of the war.⁹³ That de la Mare believed it was best not to write about the war seems apparent from his poem 'The Unutterable':

We stand aghast. Pride, rapture, grief
In storm within; on fire to bless
The daybreak; but yet wiser if
We bide that hour in silentness.

(CP460—61,v)

* * * * *

(8) THE POETRY OF PASSION

De la Mare also felt that poetry about the passionate and erotic side of love is difficult to write for perhaps the same reason as it is difficult to write successfully about war. It is 'a kind of verse that is ineffectual because it attempts the impossible . . . Emotion remembered in tranquility is stilled and clarified in the process; pleasure of the senses is very faint in recollection, and needs to be thickly painted in'. But, like physical pain, said de la Mare, this is 'extremely difficult to express durably in terms of poetry. And so the poetry of sensuous satisfaction is a very rare thing by comparison with the poetry of sensuous satiety'.⁹⁴ He had, however, no Victorian prudishness about sex, although he deplored Freud's over-emphasis on it and the modern obsession with it.⁹⁵ He was against the Victorian taboos and, although he believed that 'desire alone, cold, insensate and dark, is soon sated', he realised that most human beings are actively interested in sex, and that sex is one of the chief enjoyments of life.⁹⁶ 'We might as well upbraid a wild rose for its pistils and stamens and a nightingale for her eggs as disparage our physical organs. The intellectual resort to science, the sensitive to silence, Mrs Grundy to petticoats, Mrs Gamp and the music-hall to ribaldry'.⁹⁷ That word 'sensitive' is significant in this context, for there is no doubt that de la Mare felt a certain reserve about writing love poetry. He commented that the expression of love is usually 'reserved for poetry; though

why what is usually kept exquisitely secret, and guarded like the ramparts of paradise after the Fall from the scrutiny of every single being but one, can without acute sacrifice be sown broadcast in verse, but not in prose, is a pretty paradox'.⁹⁸

His feeling that we should not be prudish about sex is tied up with his admiration of the intricacies of the human body, which is often revealed in his work. It is a pity, he said, that we have been taught to despise it: 'It is a morbid prudery that repudiates and disparages the body — a thing of such miraculous craftsmanship and aptitudes!'.⁹⁹ He said that sex is only one course in love's banquet, but can never quite satisfy the spirit, for his conception of love was a romantic one:

Romantic love, alike at its most spiritual and at its most erotic extreme, is a strange gate into a world other than this. All experience of life, except religious experience, seems by comparison with it raw, fugitive, substitutory. It is the Sesame that discovers the Universe. It is wings to the imagination, the beginning of wisdom. 100

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(9) CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY POETS

Although de la Mare in his reviews made clear his opinions about literature and poetry in general, most of his articles were, necessarily, about the individual authors whose books he was given to review. Sometimes his views on older, classic authors such as, for example, Shakespeare, Vaughan, Suckling, Campion and Donne, can be ascertained from his reviews of reprints of their works, or books about them.¹⁰¹ Sometimes he had occasion to write about Victorian poets senior to him such as Tennyson, Poe, Barnes, Francis Thompson and Hardy.¹⁰² And of course he made references to many poets in the

introductions and notes to his anthologies and in such books as *Early One Morning* and *Desert Islands*, and in his lectures and essays.¹⁰³

Such critical views are interesting, especially when they show his wide range of reading and scholarship and where his own poetic inclinations lay.

But perhaps most interesting to us now are his criticisms of his contemporaries which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Most of the late and post-Victorians, the Edwardians and Georgians, figure in his reviews but there is little on the Modernists except for a brief mention here and there, as for example, of Ezra Pound and Edith Sitwell.¹⁰⁴ Judging from Wagenknecht's list of de la Mare's *Times Literary Supplement* articles, it seems that his most prolific reviewing years were 1915 (forty articles), 1914 (thirty-two), 1916 (twenty-six), 1919 (twenty-three) and 1913 (twenty). In the crucial years 1920 to 1923, which saw the Modernist movement beginning to make its mark with the publication in 1922 of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, only twelve pieces by de la Mare seem to have appeared in the journal, and only two of these were on poetry. So it is not surprising that he appeared to have had little to say about the Modernists. Much space had to be given to ephemeral poets whose verse has now fallen through the sieve of time. Their names appear in review articles by de la Mare such as 'New Numbers', 'Some Recent Verse' and 'Poems in War-Time'.¹⁰⁵ But a large number of his reviews were concerned with early twentieth-century poets who have now become established in literary history such as, for example, his friends Edward Thomas, W. H. Davies and Rupert Brooke. His comments on these and a few other well-known poets are worth summarising briefly, especially in so far as what he had to say about them often reflects his own inclinations and beliefs.¹⁰⁶

De la Mare admired *Edward Thomas's* simplicity and his 'pure, delicate prose'. He praised his nature description and said that no other English poet has expressed more profoundly the longing for home, the passion for solitude. Of the poems, he said that they are more matter-of-fact than most poetry; they are imaginative but have little fantasy; they are the outcome of reverie rather than vision, and are seldom touched with magic. His metres are all but sacrificed to a rhythm with the faintest possible emphasis:

Most poems are final and isolated, as it were, in their own form. In these there is a kind of endlessness in the experience they tell of, and in its expression the desire only to convey it without friction or emphasis, from consciousness to consciousness, as in the first of the morning one tells to one's self a dream. 107

In *W. H. Davies's* poems, said de la Mare, there is naiveté without pomposity. He tells his truth out of a tender, instinctively wise heart and does not litter and spoil his verse with needless lumber of the intellect. His art is simply second nature; he dares a simplicity which ornament would obscure. He rarely says anything but for that thing's sake, and seldom in a syllable more than enough for his purpose. One might call such things simple, but they are simple only in the sense that an essence is simple. 108

De la Mare thought that *Rupert Brooke* was more analytic and intellectual than the other Georgian poets and the only one who seemed to have been influenced by Donne. He was more impatient of tradition and defiant of the dictates of poetic Grundyism. His verse keeps unusually close to actual experience and is yet imaginatively in focus. He thought him the most promising of his contemporaries and a poet whose rich promise was still in its dawn:

Nothing in his work is more conspicuous than its preoccupation with actual experience, its adventurousness, its daring, its keen curiosity and interest in ideas, its life-giving youthfulness. Nothing in his work is more conspicuous by its comparative absence than reverie. 109

De la Mare thought *Ralph Hodgson's* poems very original — as downright and straightforward as that of a formidable nose in a vigorous face, and written by a man perfectly happy with a lovely world. ¹¹⁰

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, he said, never rants; he puts bare things barely. His verse is supple; its ease, the outcome of craft and labour. Sometimes the supernatural element is symbolically a little over-ingenious. ¹¹¹

De la Mare criticised *John Freeman's* roughness and lack of craftsmanship, but thought his poetry the outcome of a deeply imaginative brooding on life — on the strangeness of sleep and the dreams it brings, on the most curious riddle of death, the loveliness of childhood, and the profundity of human consciousness. He is a visionary, but he sees first the symbol, then the reality for which it stands. ¹¹²

De la Mare remarked on an aspect of *James Elroy Flecker's* poetry much in line with his own — his curious and modern absorption in the phantasmal world that lies just beyond the boundaries of sense, the idea of an unreality that haunts beneath the real. In referring to Flecker's early death, he said that young poets who die young escape the tragic survival of their own genius, and that the poet who leaves a few lyrics behind him that will outlive the passing fashion of his time has won a fair reward. He was a solitary whose one desire was to create 'beauty', and he delighted in remote times, in remote places, in names and men and relics outlandish and bizarre. His appetite was always for the strange. He made himself an artist by sheer hard work and steadily progressed towards a technical mastery. ¹¹³

De la Mare found *D. H. Lawrence's* technique interesting with its 'wavering, groping rhythms'. He thought he was an intuitive craftsman who expressed ideas and feelings, but excess of all kinds was his

weakness. Even so, 'imagination, apprehension, economy of means, and often a delicate, ecstatic beauty, are in this verse'. ¹¹⁴

He was surprisingly sympathetic also to *Walt Whitman's* looseness of form. Although Whitman belonged to an older generation, his poetry did not begin to become well known in England until the end of the nineteenth century, so in a literary sense he might be said to be almost a contemporary of the nineties and Edwardian poets. De la Mare's 1914 article is entitled 'A Futurist of the Sixties', and he had a sly dig at the modernists when he remarked here that the futurists think that poetry must be aggressive and assaulting like Whitman's. He thought that Whitman's verse sometimes sinks to effusive bathos and is percussive, explosive and egoistic; he does not isolate or focus on a moment, and de la Mare would have liked more concision and selection. However, he sings the essence of real things; his writing is the stuff of poetry, rather than poetry itself. In his review of *Drum-Taps* in 1915, de la Mare queried its success as poetry: 'The secret has evaporated in the effort to *make* poetry, or half-consciously to inject a moral, to play the Universal Bard'. ¹¹⁵

Amongst the older poets, de la Mare praised *Alice Meynell's* simplicity — 'the tranquil harvest of the most patient insight and experience'. He found her poems sad but not melancholy, resigned but not despairing, liberal, tender and full of quiet dignity. ¹¹⁶

De la Mare greatly admired *Thomas Hardy*, although he thought (in 1919) that this was too near in time to see him in perspective. He felt that *The Dynasts* would survive far beyond his own generation for its range, the breadth and boldness of its conception, its unity

in complexity and its inexhaustible creativeness. He noted the abundance and variety of Hardy's work, its homogeneousness and originality, the dramatic character of most of his poetry, even the lyrical. There is not much pure melody and his style is often crustacean. 'He forces, hammers poetry into his words; not, like most poets, charms it out of them':

Charm, grace, delicacy seem idle terms in the presence of this genius. Bare, uncompromising, mocking, pitiful, and utterly human. Mr. Hardy has gone his way, aloof, impassioned, watching life, living it, sharing it with man and nature; and, above all, loving its seared, suffering, heroic face that smiles on at grief, and is indomitable in happiness in a world that seemingly cheats to destroy. 117

De la Mare criticised *Alfred Noyes* for using too many rhetorical devices, too much repetition; there is anti-climax, false antithesis, vague emotionalism and loose thought. 118

John Masefield's craftsmanship is consummate, he thought, but his poetry is overburdened 'with moralizings, always sincere, often sententious, which are as hostile to his true lyrical impulse as is the wheeling shadow of a raven to a green copse full of linnets'. 119

De la Mare also reviewed the work of other Victorian and Edwardian poets. *Thomas Sturge Moore's* description, he said, 'seems to be one of something actually seen and scrutinized with the eye, not in dream, and yet with that peculiar effect of clearness and isolation in space and time which are the mark of dream vision'.¹²⁰ He criticised *Richard Middleton* for lax feeling and thinking and too flaccid a use of despiritualized phrases. His poetry was mostly about love and passion, a kind of verse very difficult to write well. Middleton died young, and de la Mare remarked that for a poet it is good fortune to die young: 'He at least is in no danger of burying his best work in his efforts to add to it; and age clouds youth far more

densely than can the grave' — an interesting observation when one remembers that de la Mare was himself still writing until he died aged 83.¹²¹ Of *Laurence Binyon* he wrote that his poetry is austere, without fantasy and his passion is intellectual.¹²² Writing about *James Stephens's Songs from the Clay* in 1915, de la Mare said that 'poetry is born of impulse, but cannot in this world flourish solely on honeydew and milk of Paradise. Body and soul we are; and body and soul must even a song of innocence be'. Mr Stephens is always a poet, but not always an artist, but even his poorer verse is rich in what so much excellent verse is bare of, vision, imagination, life.¹²³ About *Lascelles Abercrombie's* 'Sale of St. Thomas' he wrote that the poem is admirably constructed, kept in tone, and comes to a dramatic and serene conclusion. He also praised his 'The Olympians' and called it an amazing achievement, concise and packed with images.¹²⁴ *Gordon Bottomley's* 'End of the World' is a poem that absorbs and haunts the imagination; it is 'the poetry of magic and strangeness; indefinable, inexplicable'.¹²⁵

It can be seen that de la Mare's reviews and much that he wrote in his introductions, forewords and essays, provide valuable material for the attempt to assess his attitude to literature in general, both prose and poetry. In this chapter, I have concentrated on his criticism of poetry and, through that, on his poetic beliefs, particularly from the technical point of view. But other more generalised opinions and beliefs of his about poetry and life can also be collected together from this material. In the next chapter, I shall quote extracts to show de la Mare's feelings about those deeper things

of the spirit, which he thought absolutely essential to the writing of poetry which will endure — inspiration, impulse, imagination and the 'seeing eye'. I have also drawn together in quotations from his prose works (both in the text and in Appendix I), his philosophical ideas on such poetic subjects as Nature, Reality and Unreality, Dream, Childhood, Exile and Solitude, Time and Death, which all play an important part in his poetry.

CHAPTER 3

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE IN RELATION TO POETRY:
FROM HIS CRITICAL AND OTHER PROSE WRITINGS

'Mere endeavour will neither achieve its creation nor win the secret of its power and beauty . . . No true poem is the outcome of a purely ratiocinative process.' *

(1) INSPIRATION

Everywhere in his reviews and other prose writings de la Mare emphasised that the artist must work hard and practise his craft assiduously. Nevertheless he rated these 'purely ratiocinative' processes below inspiration and imagination in the creation of poetry, especially lyric poetry, which will succeed and survive. Lack of craftsmanship, he believed, need not necessarily make a poem 'bad', but lack of impulse and inspiration probably will. His feeling that it is difficult to write good poetry on the themes of patriotism and erotic love sprang therefore, perhaps, from the idea that these are often the types of poetry which the amateur poet attempts, because they are very common and strong human emotions under whose immediate stress he feels he *wishes* to write poetry. But, said de la Mare, many 'sometimes mistake the mere desire to write for the impulse'.¹

Poetry requires something more than sincerity. It exacts the poet's whole humanity. It is the flower of some one sudden hour of light and heat brought to its blossoming by many seasons of storm and rain and dew and darkness. The sublimest devotion is useless unless expression take fire from the inexplicable flame of life. Extremely bad verse is often certainly as sincere as flawless verse that yet falls short of poetry. 2

He thought that 'the creative impulse, the visiting spirit' was essential.³

The metaphor of the fire and flame and flash of inspiration was a favourite one with de la Mare: 'It is the moment of inspiration when the thought flashes into being, its form its very self, that reveals the poet and divides his work from that which is merely the elaborated outcome of good intention or taste'.⁴ Criticising the sonnets of Judith Lytton, he wrote: 'The words are beautiful, ornate, the cadence charms and lulls, the vague and at times confused imagery works on the mind like some drowsy syrup of the East. But too seldom do thought and feeling suddenly blaze into one flame'.⁵ The initial moment of creation must, he said (in another favourite image), like 'Pegasus "nostrils aflame", tail and mane tossing wildly in the air', be allowed its head.⁶

The words 'impulse' and 'intuition' recur frequently in de la Mare's critical writings from the early years to the later:

- (i) Impulse was the nucleus of every poem ever written (1913)
- (ii) Poetry is one of the inscrutable elements of mortal life . . . child of genius . . . of impulse and intuition rather than of intellect (1915)
- (iii) All literature, and especially poetry, though a heightened and concentrated reflection of national thought and life, and the continuous evolution of a tradition, is also the unforeseen and solitary release of an individual impulse (1916)
- (iv) All true poetry, and certainly the purest, in the last resort, springs from, and for its communication is dependent on, a rare intuition of the mind and spirit (1935)
- (v) No art can be taught, though its practice may be aided — in an artist. And even he can teach himself only that part of his *style* which is not intuitive (1943)⁷

The opening paragraph of de la Mare's introduction to *Chardin* reveals his love of the rich and happy life of the artist. Such a man, he felt, whose 'temperament' is of a species unfamiliar to the

rest of mankind, needs solitude for the practice of his art, even though he may at other times delight in company. Only in isolation, up there in his 'attic', are 'acute perception, intense heed, the upswellings of impulse and imagination, the labyrinths of reflection and the inmost companionship of self with self, and that enlightenment, fully attainable'. ⁸

In his belief in the importance of inspiration, de la Mare stands with Housman who, although he also recognised the necessity of good craftsmanship, reminded us of Plato's dictum:

He who without the Muses' madness in his soul comes knocking at the door of poesy and thinks that art will make him anything fit to be called a poet, finds that the poetry which he indites in his sober senses is beaten hollow by the poetry of madmen. ⁹

This conviction that poetry transcends conscious art leads de la Mare to maintain that though a poet can be a critic of others, it is difficult for him to scrutinize his own work (which perhaps gives some encouragement to the literary scholar):

Only to a limited extent can an author judge of his own work. On purely technical questions he may be his own acute critic, but even here are obvious limitations. To the essential quality that makes his books a reflex of his personality . . . he must always remain a stranger. ¹⁰

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(2) IMAGINATION

For de la Mare inspiration, intuition and impulse must be allied, in the writer, to a fine and potent imagination which he thought was of vital importance, not only to the artist but to any man: 'Without imagination of the one kind or the other mortal existence is indeed a dreary prosaic business'. ¹¹ He found, he said, a peculiar delight in reading W. H. Hudson and, in a leading article on his *The Book of a*

Naturalist, asked if Hudson was not addressing the 'wraith of a child' in us, 'the lost youth of the imagination', for it is in childhood he felt that imagination is at its strongest. He continued: 'It is the imagination in such writers as Richard Jefferies and Edward Thomas, in Izaak Walton and Traherne, that weaves enchantment into, tinged with magic, what they have seen and describe'.¹²

It is obvious that imagination played an important part in de la Mare's life, as he demonstrated in his article "My Mind To Me . . ." (already noticed in Chapter I).¹³ His allegorical introduction to his anthology for children — the enchanting *Come Hither* — shows this clearly too. We may see in the character of the little boy Simon, who visits the house of Earth (Thrae) and Nature (Miss Taroone/Tarune) and the turret room belonging to Human Nature (Nahum Tarune), the boy de la Mare, finding out for himself the beauties of the earth and the fascination of the world of imagination. Telling Simon about Nahum, Miss Taroone says that some of the pictures in his room 'are pictures of nothing on earth. He has his two worlds'. When Simon asked what she meant by the 'two worlds', she replied:

"Now I must say to you, Simon," . . . "wherever you may be in that body of yours, you feel you look out of it, do you not?"

I nodded. "Yes, Miss Taroone."

"Now think, then, of Mr. Nahum's round room; where is that?"

"Up there," said I, pointing up a rambling finger.

"Ah!" cried Miss Taroone, "so it may be. But even if to-morrow you are thousands of miles distant from here on the other side of this great Ball, or in its bowels, or flying free — you will still carry a picture of it, will you not? And that will be within you?"

"Yes, in my mind, Miss Taroone?" I answered rather sheepishly.

"In your mind," she echoed me, but not as if she were particularly pleased at the fact. "Well, many of the pictures I take it in Mr. Nahum's round tower are of *that* world. His MIND." 14

This image of the two worlds of fact and imagination which Miss Tarroone speaks about and which de la Mare described in his poem 'Dreams' ('Two worlds have we: without; within;'), is an important one in his work.¹⁵ He believed that the world within, that of the mind and imagination, enabled a man to find beauty and interest even in a bare backyard. 'Man at his best', he wrote, 'is a wise and happy child whose felicity dwells in a fancy, who can convert stone walls into an earthly paradise, and the gutter into a mattress stuffed with the insubstantial rose-leaves of a dream'.¹⁶ The outside world of fact and everyday reality for him was not the most important part of life. Writing about Beatrix Potter, he said: 'Also, *in excelsis*, she had the images and creations of her own mind's making which no one could deprive her of, that "kingdom" — for so many children who are never less alone than when alone — called the Imagination'.¹⁷ One feels that de la Mare would be one of those people who could successfully live through a period of solitary confinement. Indeed, he commented once to Russell Brain when he was ill and almost entirely confined to his room for two years, that he felt it no deprivation, saying 'it is the inward life that matters'.¹⁸

Never could it be said of de la Mare that he himself lacked imagination, although Douglas Garman, in a scathingly critical article, said that 'his poetry fails because he lacks imagination', although he has fancy in plenty.¹⁹ But most critics agree that he was highly imaginative. W. W. Robson says that 'his real subject was the imagination'.²⁰ Priestley thought that, though he was of the lesser order of geniuses, he is still high above the mass of authors by reason of his intense imagination.²¹ Lord David Cecil commented that, for de la Mare, the world of the imagination was just as real

as the 'real' world.²² And Frank Swinnerton wrote that the essence of his verse was imagination.²³ Indeed, one cannot read anything written by de la Mare — novels, stories, poems and humourous verse — without realising that they are the product of an immensely fertile, imaginative mind.

The possession of imagination, so important in de la Mare's view to even the ordinary person's life, is, he thought, absolutely essential to the artist. In *Desert Islands* he wrote:

The enduring influence of most great writers and of all poets springs out of the livelong conflict within them between the world of their imagination and the great world without. It is rather their unlikeness than their resemblance to their fellows that distinguishes them; the rareness of the qualities they reveal, often at strife with those common to all. 24

And he continued: 'Nowadays it would be agreed, perhaps, that some power of imagination is as essential to a true sanity as the faculty of reason'.²⁵

* * * * *

(3) THE INWARD EYE

This faculty of imagination is what de la Mare often called 'the inward eye' or 'mind-sight' and it is, he thought, closely allied to dream. In his Introduction to *Behold This Dreamer*, there is a chapter entitled 'The Inward Eye', obviously based on Wordsworth's phrase 'that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude' which, indeed, he quotes. Very seldom, he said, do we pay attention to this inward eye, and yet

Everyman . . . can no more dispense with this sovran facility than can the tale-teller, the poet, the artist, the mathematician (perhaps), the actor, or even the acrobat and the juggler . . . By this means we recognise what we are seeking; sensuously and vividly recall innumerable moments of the past; animate our morrows — transmute, astonishing feat, the print of a tale or poem into phantoms of the mind whose misfortunes may devastate the heart. 26

There is a Blakeian philosophy here and, in fact, de la Mare quoted the following passage from Blake twice:

But to the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers. You certainly mistake, when you say that the visions of fancy are not to be found in this world. To me this world is all one continued vision. 27

Just as we often neglect our inward eye, our imagination, so do we also neglect our outward eye, which de la Mare called the 'Seeing Eye' which is 'the grace, inspiration, and joy of every poet that has ever walked this earth, and shared the stars'. 28

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(4) THE SEEING EYE

The inward eye is the one with which we look in upon the world of the imagination and the seeing eye the one we use to look out upon the world of the senses: 'Some of us are adepts only with those remarkable mirrors, blue, brown, or grey, which were uncurtained for us on our natal day. Others, keeping the external organ open, but vacant, in its socket, can watch the visionary unfold itself, take movement, life, beauty, an inexhaustible significance.' 29

The eye is an important image in de la Mare's work and Luce Bonnerot notes the importance of the verb 'to see' for him. He also used very often such synonymous verbs as 'to scrutinize', 'to stare' and 'to look'. 'Look thy last on all things lovely,/ Every hour . . .' he wrote in his well-known poem 'Fare Well' (CP218). And this idea that we should look very carefully, gaze at and scrutinize things with a curious eye that really sees them properly, that 'the customary is usually the little heeded', is a constant theme in all his work.³⁰

'True seeing, of course,' he said, 'let alone vision, implies . . . not merely looking and observing but scrutinizing; not only an eager and alert sensibility but the mind and imagination and the spirit; not only insight but divination'.³¹

With this passion for really seeing goes its corollary in de la Mare — the belief that this world is an exciting place and that we should be interested in life and enjoy it with all our hearts. 'To be and to go on being . . . interested . . . is, of course, the whole secret of life'.³² No yardstick, he said, can be devised to measure the profound loveliness and significance which imagination can give to the world around us.³³ He praised those authors who have this enthusiasm for life and find it a fascinating experience. He reviewed Feodor Sologub's stories, for instance, finding them an 'extraordinary mingling of the simple and happy with the sinister and macabre' (like his own, we may feel); and he quoted Sologub's rapturous passage about the beauty of the earth: 'How beautiful thou art, my earth, my golden, my emerald, my sapphire earth! Who, born to its heritage would care to die'.³⁴ He praised the zest for life of Arnold Bennett as he describes 'the slow, vast, creaking panorama, by which every human creature moves in by one pigeon-hole out of eternity, and moves out by another'.³⁵ And he commented on Tchekov's belief that we must enjoy every minute of life, for we only live once.³⁶

De la Mare believed that for the artist the seeing eye is essential, not only in an active but in a meditative sense:

So, too, any work of art — whatever its medium — that is worthy of the name of poetry invariably reveals a mind sharply and deeply interested and concerned; it tells of the vivid realization of some moment, some aspect of human life and of human experience. Its value, then, as a work of man depends not upon its theme, but upon the intensity, penetration and comprehension of the writer — upon himself.³⁷

Studying is not the only way of using the solitude necessary to an artist. Watching, listening, meditating, even day-dreaming, are all part of life; and writing and reading, as well as action, are also a way of living life.³⁸ Life can be amazingly romantic if we will but see and live.³⁹ Nature is our book, said Wordsworth, and de la Mare agreed: 'There is a world crammed with things bright and beautiful . . . with living creatures wild and free, natural and faithful, great and small'.⁴⁰

De la Mare had this 'seeing eye' himself. He had a meditative mind sharply and deeply interested and concerned, and also the faculty of intense and faithful observation of the actual. He is praised by Auden for his sharp, accurate descriptions, and by Graham Greene for bringing the natural visible world sharply to the eye.⁴¹ This capacity for detailed observation and description is illustrated by his special love for small things and also by the catalogues he frequently compiled of the things he loved.⁴² Such lists, while incidentally providing autobiographical material about de la Mare's likes and dislikes (as already mentioned), are also a help in the study of his imagery. They sometimes illustrate too his feeling for contrast which has been noticed by many critics:

Most living things we welcome as bright and enlivening; but not all — not even all trees or birds or flowers: the deadly nightshade, the hemlock, the yew, the weeping-willow, the shriek-owl, the vulture. There are fresh green woods, and there are forests dark and menacing with their own night. There are merry, sunny, chattering brooks, and there are pools cold and stagnant under a waning moon. There are jolly little gigs and there are hearses; red cheeks and bones.⁴³

As Luce Bonnerot says:

L'exilé peut bien un instant contempler la beauté de ce monde, mais toujours, derrière la Vie, se profile la Mort; derrière la Beauté, la Corruption; derrière la Lumière, l'Ombre.⁴⁴

(5) NATURE

The wonderful world of nature then, said de la Mare, is ours to enjoy, if we had but the seeing eye and would look carefully and lovingly at its beauties — not only the mountains, the valleys, the forests and the seas, but the smallest creatures and objects: a tiny bird or insect, a flower, even a blade of grass or a pebble. He thought that 'with the lessening of our contact with nature we have allowed our vitality to be absorbed by mental activity', and that we should try and get closer to nature to counteract this.⁴⁵ An author like W. H. Hudson can help us here. In de la Mare's review of *The Book of a Naturalist* he quoted the story of the child who said to his mother: 'I can see lots of things with my heart . . . I've got green trees and a lot of flowers in my heart'. Later he wrote: 'A flower, no less than bird, roe-deer, serpent, nautilus, or "big-game", can confer this rare transitory sense of being "in nature" and freed from the conditions which have made us artificial'.⁴⁶ In 1915, with all the horror of the war about him, de la Mare wrote that 'man may bring hell itself into the world, but that Nature ever patiently waits to be his natural paradise'.⁴⁷

He was fascinated by the lovely phenomena of nature in all her aspects. One of her beauties and marvels which he constantly mentioned is the craftsmanship of the human body, which is 'one of the most delicate and complicated pieces of mechanism in the world, any single organ of which, hand, heart or eye . . . infinitely surpasses in craftsmanship, subtlety and operation the domestic mower, motor car or sewing machine'.⁴⁸ He felt the presence of some Spirit behind Nature, perhaps a Creator: 'The Material world surrenders its secrets to the materialist; but that world is God's reflex of the spirit and

imagination of man'.⁴⁹ And, for him, 'nature itself resembles a veil over some further reality of which the imagination in its visionary moments seems to achieve a more direct evidence',⁵⁰

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(6) REALITY

De la Mare was one of those visionary poets who feel strongly that there are two kinds of reality. There is the so-called 'real' life apprehended by the senses which the ordinary, unimaginative man and woman takes on verifiable factual grounds to be the true world. And there is a further reality, apprehended by the mind of the highly imaginative man and woman, which they believe lies behind the material world. Wallace Stevens echoes de la Mare's 'what is real need not be actual' when he writes: 'What we see in the mind is as real to us as what we see by the eye'.⁵¹ More recently, Ted Hughes said:

I have tried to suggest how infinitely beyond our ordinary notions of what we know our real knowledge, the real facts for us, really is. And to live removed from this inner universe of experience is also to live removed from oneself, banished from oneself and real life. ⁵²

The word 'realism' has, however, gathered a pejorative sense in the twentieth century. In art particularly, because of the popularity of the impressionist mode perhaps, it has come to mean an exact fidelity of representation — a tedious photographic type of verisimilitude to the actual. In literature the phrase 'social realism' often implies that the exact details given are of an unpleasant and sordid kind (a definition which was beginning to gain ground in the mid-nineteenth century). De la Mare preferred the older definition (without such accreted nuances of meaning), of

minute fidelity of representation, observation and truth to life, and the word 'actualism' to describe it. In fact, he specifically made a difference between actualism (exact likeness to) and realism. ⁵³

In his article 'I Became an Author' he said that writing may be a compensation, an escape from self into another self, that it may be 'a sort of unpremeditated exploration of an experience antecedent to one's present earthly life: or even the outcome of a thirst for a reality distinct from the actual'. ⁵⁴

In *Behold This Dreamer* he called actuality 'all that relates in life to broad daylight', the 'wholly wide-awake, and to complete consciousness'; that is the life which Longfellow described as real, which we can control and of which we are fully aware. ⁵⁵

He spoke scathingly of what he called the modern 'realist', 'who walks the world spying out the inconspicuous refuse of experience', and of 'the pigsty of what is falsely called "realism"'. ⁵⁶ Referring to Hardy, he said: 'It may be convenient to call him a realist — though what poet, if reality is the habitation of the spirit as well of the body, can be anything else is a nice question. A more precise term would be realizationist'. ⁵⁷

De la Mare has often been accused by the critics of escapism and lack of reality and attention to the material world around him. But, in fact, several critics have noted that, although we tend to think of him as a dreamer, both his verse and prose contain a great deal of precise and accurate observation of life, and this close observation gives actuality even to the most imaginative and fantastic of his poems. Auden said that he 'never prettifies experience or attempts to conceal from the young that terror and nightmare are as essential characteristics of human existence as love and sweet dreams'. ⁵⁸ Forrest Reid

commented on 'this curiosity of observation, this interest and joy in the minutest details of earth's beauty . . . Mr. de la Mare carries into the most visionary poems, giving them body and actuality'.⁵⁹ And an anonymous leader writer in 1953 remarked on his 'hard hitting realism in language and matter'.⁶⁰

De la Mare himself said many times that the poet and artist are often quite practical people. Dreaming usually requires a very capable mind; and Shakespeare, a most practical man, was continually comparing life to a transitory and evanescent dream. In fact, said de la Mare, 'no mind can grasp actuality so hardly and unflinchingly as an imaginative mind'.⁶¹ As Wagenknecht points out, de la Mare was well aware of the necessity of balancing the two poles of realism and romance. He called them 'this horrific pair':

No writer of genius ever sat down with the positive intention of being a *realist* or a *romantic*. Realism is an inadequate representation of life because, whether wilfully or for the reason that the realist is insensitive, it ignores feeling; romanticism is equally inadequate because it fastidiously rejects all that does not harmonize with its fanciful make-believe.⁶²

The more magical or mystical poetry is, he said, the more it requires substantial expression. He criticised Alfred Noyes's *Tales of the Mermaid Tavern*, saying that 'a really creative conception would have laboured for that reality without which romance is tinsel'.⁶³ The great writers, he thought, are those who are conscious of the existence of both kinds of reality, and they must translate both worlds for the average man:

So dingy are most adult imaginations, and so thorned in with material worries, and immortal anxieties, and a stodgy heredity, and the deadly environment of too much money, or of the longing for more, or of the absence of any, that most of their joy and beauty must come at second hand, and be translated for them out of experience by an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and an itch to write so pertinacious that its victim is compelled to share his treasures.⁶⁴

De la Mare realized, however, that there are many varieties of reality and the sense of fact: 'One man's actual may be another's wildest romance', he wrote.⁶⁵

Yet, in spite of de la Mare's acute apprehension of everyday life and his close observation and often homely detail, the average reader of his work is usually conscious of another and, to him, less real world constantly impinging on that world of actuality. To de la Mare this 'other world' — the world of imagination and dream — was *not* less real. 'Where, if not within . . . is the sole reality of life', he asked.⁶⁶ And there is quite often a suggestion that he believed the real world of the senses may, in fact, be unreal, an idea which does present itself on occasion to any imaginative thinker such as, for example, Sir Thomas Browne (a favourite writer of his), whom he quoted in *Come Hither*: 'And surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this world, and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next as the phantasms of the night to the conceits of the day'.⁶⁷ We are constantly made aware, as Victoria Sackville-West remarked, that de la Mare's major preoccupation was with the 'ultimate Real', with time, with the voyage of life, and with death.⁶⁸

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(7) DREAM

De la Mare was deeply interested in the subject of dream and well-read in it also, as his quotations in *Behold This Dreamer* show.⁶⁹ He revealed his love of the life of dream, day-dream, memory and imagination in the introductions to his anthologies and in many of his reviews. The long sub-title to *Behold This Dreamer* mentions Reverie,

Sleep, Dream, Nightmare, the Unconscious and the Imagination specifically. In *Early One Morning* he equates dream, day-dream and memory with imagination and 'making up' and it is obvious that this visionary, fantastic world was his delight: ⁷⁰

The temptation to indulge in fastidious fantasies, to spend a life of dreamful solitude with fruit of the lotus for one's daily fare, is only likely to entangle the fortunate few. It is most men's evil chance to have neither the time, nor even the heart, for day-dreams. ⁷¹

Note the word 'fortunate' in this passage, and the word 'pines' in the next:

Dreams — which are, after all, only the fragmentary memories of themselves — are at once the most capricious and the most beguiling phenomena in mortal experience . . . they may haunt the mind with a strangeness, beauty, terror or elusive significance beyond that of any daylight traffic with actuality . . . So insidious may be this nocturnal experience that the habitual dreamer pines for a midnight that shall readmit him into that visionary world wherein he is freed from the day's more incoherent, restless, disjointed, and irksome phantasmagoria. ⁷²

'Can you be sure anything is not a dream?', and 'Isn't a dream just as real' as a waking experience, de la Mare asked Russell Brain.⁷³ He made little distinction between dreaming and day-dreaming in this respect. He thought that day-dreaming is the most active kind of living of which the human mind is capable and, for him, dreaming was a kind of experience: 'For my own part, I have spent in sleep a far more active and adventurous existence than has been my outward lot in the waking day', he said. ⁷⁴ In *Behold This Dreamer* he quoted Cathie in *Wuthering Heights*: 'I have dreamed in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas;' and this, said de la Mare, was his experience also. Indeed, he quoted many of his own dreams in startlingly vivid detail in *Behold This Dreamer* and there are short stories of his which are based on dreams as, for example, 'The Cartouche'. ⁷⁵

De la Mare had much to say about dreams and the poet and he believed that poetry owed a great debt to dream. Once, the dreamer held a high place in society, he remarked; but now 'Here comes this dreamer' is the ironic jibe of the practical man. But surely, said de la Mare, dream which is so universal a phenomenon cannot be of *no* use, no service.⁷⁶ For him, 'the world of poetry merges indiscernibly into that of dream', and 'every imaginative poem . . . itself resembles in its onset and in its effect the experience of dreaming'.⁷⁷

His own poetry and stories reveal de la Mare as, on the whole, a dreamer-poet, one of those solitaires he described in a review:

Their land is the land of dreams, of reverie, of deep, quiet broodings. However close and truthful their witness to beauty, it does not content them to paint the lively, seductive exterior of a thing; they must as far as possible share its life, become what it is. They are immaterialists, and reflect life as the stillness of a pool reflects day. ⁷⁸

He discussed the difference between the ordinary human being and the artist. The ordinary person, when he wakes from sleep and dream, recognises as illusion what he will, nonetheless, retain as experience, and even valuable experience perhaps, 'whereas in all work of the imagination the artist creates — or discovers, and records what comes to him in similar guise, but in so doing he gives it form and graces it with a design and coherence denied to the hotch-potch of casual events and the response to them of which our daily life is made up'. ⁷⁹

The first chapter in Brain's book *Tea with Walter de la Mare* is entitled 'The Little Nowhere', a phrase which de la Mare distilled from Rupert Brooke's poem 'The Treasure' ('that no-place which gave them birth'). Brain said that the phrase 'proved to be a key which opened a realm of discourse in which he delighted, which embraced

brain, mind and spirit and their interrelations, and was illuminated by dreams, imagination and the poetic vision'.⁸⁰ De la Mare believed strongly that art and science, dream, imagination and reality should not be artificially separated; and, in children, they are not: they 'live in a world peculiarly their own . . . Between their dream and their reality looms no impassable abyss'.⁸¹

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(8) CHILDHOOD

Childhood for de la Mare is the peak time for imagination, the seeing eye and joy in life. It is a radiant time and, in his adult work, it became a symbol of the Golden Age, our Lost Paradise. A child, he wrote, 'touches and touches, he bangs and bangs, he tastes and tastes, he stares and stares . . . Chilling habit and enforced knowledge have not as yet dimmed his eyes, sapped his attention, or set only ajar a once wide-open door'.⁸² In a review of Herbert Read's *The Innocent Eye* he quoted Vaughan's 'angel infancy' and Wordsworth's 'trailing clouds of glory';⁸³ and he referred to both Vaughan and Traherne in his introduction to Ian Dall's book about his childhood, *Sun Before Seven*.⁸⁴ In fact, it is obvious everywhere in his work that he is close to these poets in his attitude to childhood and was influenced by their conception of childhood as a 'blessed state in which we are still near to the Heaven that is our home'.⁸⁵ But then 'the morning dew begins to dry up' and it is time to go to school.⁸⁶ It may be at the age of seven, as it was for Ian Dall, or ten, when de la Mare said many of us 'cross a viewless bridge that we shall never tread again'.⁸⁷ This is the bridge which Simon, in *Come Hither*, had to cross when he was sent to school and had to leave

behind him the world of childhood and imagination which he had enjoyed in Miss Taroone's house of Thrae. 'Successful people grow up; the happiest people . . . never do'.⁸⁸

De la Mare himself seems to have retained even into old age a memory of what it is like to be a child and he had, therefore, an uncanny understanding of children and a psychological apprehension of the world of the child. One need not lose this understanding, he believed, for 'we are born in spirit, if not in mind, of an age, or of no age, which, with variations, we shall continue in until we die'.⁸⁹ Even when one is old one may still be 'young in wonder'.⁹⁰

It is clear from the amount of children's verse and stories which he wrote, from his anthologies for children, from his book *Early One Morning*, and from the fact that his writings and conversation were full of reminiscences about his own childhood, that the subject played a major part in his life.⁹¹ In his introduction to *Sun Before Seven*, he remarked that during the last two or three years he had read a great deal of autobiography, keeping chiefly to its earlier chapters, and he confessed that he would never weary of reading such books about children.⁹²

Although de la Mare seemed to know the inner heart of the child so well, he realised how difficult it is to understand them, to remember one's own childhood and to feel as one felt as a child.⁹³ 'It is an odd fact', he wrote, 'that though all men share the experience of the first few stealthy, engrossed, isolated years of life, so few should be able to retrieve them from the placid deeps of consciousness.'⁹⁴

Children are wary of telling secrets he said in *Early One Morning*. They are aloof and self-contained. Those who attempt to understand them, even though they were once children themselves, and have memories of their own childhood, seem to be mere fumblers and have little skill

in interpreting the child mind.⁹⁵

De la Mare was very down-to-earth about the world of the child and was quite unsentimental:

Children are seldom lovers of children. They do not gape at their own innocence, nor marvel at imaginations as natural to them as spectacles to an elderly nose, nor sit cherubically smiling at themselves amid their trailing clouds of glory. They dwell and flourish in their own natures, praeternaturally practical and crafty pygmies in the world of dull tyrannical giants into which it has pleased God to call them. ⁹⁶

This unsentimental approach is seen in his stories such as 'In the Forest', 'Miss Duveen' and 'The Almond Tree', which all show young children in situations which are tragic from the adult point of view, but where the child is more concerned with his own doings and comfort than with the misfortunes or even deaths in the adult world around him.⁹⁷

It is interesting, in view of the widespread acclaim for de la Mare's own verse for children, to see what he wrote about poetry for or about children in general: 'Most modern verse . . . is apt to prettify its children, dream or real; to patheticize them, scattering its lines with such words as tiny, guileless, girlish, tomboy, tears, angels, death and Heaven'.⁹⁸ He was scathing in his picture of Swinburne walking round Putney, looking in prams and being ecstatic about babies. In his poems, he said, there is scarcely a trace of any positive baby, and they are empty compared to Blake's 'Helpless, naked, piping loud'.⁹⁹ When true poets write about childhood itself rather than children, and particularly their own childhood, their 'outlook and imaginative treatment are seldom sentimental'.¹⁰⁰

De la Mare had rich praise for Hans Christian Andersen's stories. He wrote about Andersen as if he shared and understood something of his nature. His early life seemed to him, he said, 'a phantasm, as it often does to a child of a solitary, volatile, conscientious disposition,

confronted with the amazingly real. It was a phantasm with sinister shadows'. To the last of his seventy years he was a child at heart, and a number of his stories, and some of these among the best, 'appeal more directly to the ruminating, memory-bewitched mind of the grown-up'. Their atmosphere and their minute observation and inconsequentiality are childlike.¹⁰¹

The picture he drew of Andersen as a child has much in common with the typical de la Mare child (perhaps a mirror-image of the little boy that he himself once was), who appears so often in his stories — Nicholas in 'The Almond Tree'; Philip in 'The Guardian'; Arthur in 'Miss Duveen'; Rob in 'In the Forest', and the little boys in 'The Princess' and 'An Ideal Craftsman': all serious, solitary, imaginative and contemplative children.¹⁰²

Childhood he said, in another article, is 'a life of the strangest solitude and silence, of wisdom as opposed to knowledge, and to a reality whose only counterpart in after life is the world of dream'.¹⁰³

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(9) SOLITUDE AND EXILE

'What angel in my own remote childhood, I wonder, taught me when alone to be happy', wrote de la Mare in his chapter on 'Solitude' in *Early One Morning*.¹⁰⁴

He discussed solitude in *Love* and quoted Montaigne: 'The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself'.¹⁰⁵ He quoted him again in *Desert Islands* where he described in detail his conception of various kinds of solitude. Being alone held no terror for him, for he felt it impossible ever to be really alone when one had the company in one's own mind of 'all memory's old voices, reminders, warnings, evocations, callings, fragments of music, siren voices, the past years' birds and one's

childhood'.¹⁰⁶ 'Lonely' and 'solitary' are key words in his work and there are many solitary characters in his stories, for example, Jean Elspeth in 'Lucy', Miss Curtis in 'The Picnic' and 'Mr Kempe'.¹⁰⁷

The visionary and mystic poet is a solitary who dwells in an atmosphere of dreams and reverie, but de la Mare appreciated the dangers to the artist of being too solitary and retired from the world:

The artist who escapes . . . from the shocks of actuality and enwraps himself in the solitude of his imagination may learn many secrets and attain to an esoteric knowledge of the truth that lies concealed beneath appearances. But his exile brings its own penalties. He loses touch and sympathy with the thoughts and desires, the loves, cares, follies of this workaday world; and dreams at last may cheat him of his goal. On the other hand, if he disobeys his intuitions and gives himself even to the best of practical causes he risks the sacrifice of the rarer imaginative truth which is in him. 108

Every artist is confronted with some such choice. If he wants to continue with his work he must 'stand back from the press of habit and convention. He must recapture solitude'. 109

For de la Mare, the child is an exile from a pre-natal lost Paradise; the adult is an exile from his childhood; and the poet feels himself even more of an exile in the world of fact, perhaps because his more acute sensibilities and vivid imagination, nurtured in the solitude which his contemplative nature craves, increase his awareness of his lonely situation. In his discussion with Stephen Spender on poetry, de la Mare quoted from his friend Forrest Reid's autobiography *Apostate*:

The primary impulse of the artist springs, I fancy, from discontent, and his art is a kind of crying for Elysium, for a country whose image was stamped upon our soul before we opened our eyes on earth, and all our life is little more than a trying to get back there, our art than a mapping of its mountains and streams. 110

(10) LIFE AND TIME

In his poems *The Traveller* and 'The Listeners' and in many other poems and stories, de la Mare pictured in symbols and images which are central to his work, the isolated, lonely, questioning soul of man as traveller on the long journey of ordeal and quest which is life. For de la Mare 'life that is worthy of the name is for every man a bitter conflict' both in things material and things spiritual.¹¹¹ This conflict is twofold. We fight to master circumstance in youth and we fight to accommodate ourselves to it. We fight for self realization 'and to win also to some kind of shelter and security from the dangers and disasters that threaten us from without'.¹¹²

De la Mare constantly questioned the significance of life. He felt that in the midst of life we are in eternity, and that it is impossible to see it whole; 'we are not yet masters of the fourth dimension'.¹¹³ His ideas about the riddle of the universe and Man's existence were deeply ambivalent. In a review of Robert Bridges's *The Spirit of Man* he quoted a passage taken from Father Zossima's discourse in *The Brothers Karamazof*: 'Much on earth is hidden from us, but there is given us in recompense the secret conviction of our living bond with another world: and the very roots of our thoughts and sensations are not here but there, in other worlds'.¹¹⁴

In some ways de la Mare is very much a modern in his views about life. In spite of his apparently romantic attitude he is a child of the twentieth century scientific age in that he was always prepared to consider all possibilities and reject traditional beliefs. The decline of religion had already started in his day and,

like many others, he had to struggle to find a deeper meaning behind existence and to discover how Man fits into the great scheme of the universe. He would have been a ready disciple for the modern view voiced by Professor Paul Davies that the 'new physics' can perhaps provide an answer:

I believe the new physics sweeps away much of the traditional imagery of a God 'out there', embedded in absolute time. Outmoded concepts have been replaced by an astonishing collection of new ideas, abstract and sometimes bizarre, which could dictate the shape of religion in the coming generations. The richness and subtlety of the new physics is proving compulsive to those searching for a modern explanation of existence. 115

For de la Mare, as for modern scientists, the cosmos seems to be full of wonder and paradox, and the harmony and order within it, which has been revealed by science and mathematics, made him feel that there must be behind it some genius, perhaps a Creator.¹¹⁶ In such a world of challenging ideas, de la Mare thought that poetry is an 'effort to think the unthinkable'.¹¹⁷

'Transient' is another of de la Mare's key words. This life which is so full of riddles is brief and transient. He was fascinated by the concept of time, as his poem *Winged Chariot* shows. There is a passage in one of his reviews (repeated with revisions in *Behold This Dreamer*), which reveals his preoccupation with all Time's facets:

Whether time is 'one side of a four-dimensional continuum that is perfectly isotropic' or but an imposture of consciousness, whether it is the eternal despair of the metaphysician or the livelong enemy of a clock-maker to be disposed of by death, it remains an eel-like enigma in which the humblest mind can delightfully entangle itself. We pray, hasten! — Time stands still. We cry, stay! — it flies like a swallow. We forget it; it forgets us. Hashish plays ducks and drakes with it. Sleep denies it . . . It is childhood's leaden wings; it is age's rushing, soundless river. It is common coin — golden, too — to be spent, saved, or wasted, of which instant by instant we each of us, according to Big Ben, have precisely the same amount. Furthermore, it is the bars of our cage or aviary which simply vanish away 'the moment' we begin to sing, or to listen to a fellow-captive engaged in the same inexplicable pursuit. 118

However fleeting life may be we must be grateful for its beauty, grasp every lovely 'spot of time' and treasure it even when we are old and nearing death. The *carpe diem* theme is everywhere in his work, as is the theme of death:

Time was: Time is: Time is not, runs the rune.
Hasten then. Seize that *is*, so soon begone. 119

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(11) DEATH

De la Mare's questioning interest in death lies shadow-like over his work. ¹²⁰ To Brain he said he did not know why this interest in death should be considered morbid. ¹²¹ Just as poets are apt to be more interested in the world of dream and the visionary life than ordinary people, so they are apt to be concerned with death. ¹²² He himself was always fascinated by cemeteries and gravestones, as his book of stories and epitaphs, *Ding Dong Bell* shows. He noted Shakespeare's live-long absorption in the thought of death, and he himself saw it in various guises and through the medium of a variety of images. ¹²³

Like his Traveller, we may rejoin triumphantly, in death, the divine light or, at the end of life's conflict, we may find the peace of the 'all-welcoming grave'. ¹²⁴ Death may be the drawing aside of a veil which separates us from our lost Elysium: 'The nearer to death the spirit of man ventures — a death that for this very reason we believe to be only a veil between one life and another — the more intense grows the sense of reality'. ¹²⁵ He oscillated between the belief that death is only 'a wicket out into the dark', and that life itself is only a dream and that death is an awakening to the real life

beyond: 'Man's natural tendency is to be alive. It is an instinct that many of us believe will survive death'.¹²⁶ Indeed, in the chapter 'The Bourne' in *Behold This Dreamer*, he quoted Calderon:

How if our waking life, like that of sleep,
Be all a dream in that eternal life
To which we wake not till we sleep in death? 127

And in a review, he wrote:

The mind from childhood is too often taught to think of heaven as a region of changeless perfection, where we — poor souls that cling so closely to the shelter of our dust — shall live in an icy forever, inexpressibly happy, inexpressibly homeless; and not simply as a state of being, of infinite gradations, that it needs only true wisdom and innocence to find here and now. 128

De la Mare's *Times Literary Supplement* reviews particularly, supplemented by his other prose work, provide many illuminating glimpses of his views on literature and life and have proved a valuable source of material in this attempt to reveal the mind and heart of the poet, when other more usual sources have been lacking. His beliefs and general line of thinking set down in this chapter will be expanded upon in the next two chapters, when I shall try and discuss the philosophy of life which is expressed in his poems. As I noted earlier, I am encouraged in this attempt by the fact that de la Mare thought that the artist is revealed in his work and that the critic should try and discover through that work the artist's personality. 'The merest hint of autobiography is a singularly familiarizing thing', de la Mare wrote, 'and forms a bond between the writer and the reader'.¹²⁹

CHAPTER 4

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE: FROM HIS POEMS I

'In all poetry some definite philosophy of life is inherent.'

'Ich würde sagen, dass hinter jedem Gedicht ja immer wieder unübersehbar der Autor steht, sein Wesen, sein Sein, seine innere Lage . . .'

*

(1) INTRODUCTION

Walter de la Mare's work has an holistic quality which is apparent when the reviews and other non-fiction material, the poems, novels and short stories are read together. Behind each stands the author and in each genre he expressed a similar basic philosophy of life. The stories and novels have much in common with the poetry, especially in the imagery used, and the short stories, particularly, often show in their style and diction something of the poetic mode.¹ David Cecil remarked on the connection between the prose works and the poetry when he said that de la Mare exhibits his vision most fully in his prose works, while 'in his poems he rather pin-points some aspect of it; loving delight in nature, dream of beauty or of terror, sense of the transience of all things mortal, apprehension of death, bewilderment at the dark riddle of existence'.² Owen Barfield also noticed a link between them which he thought was the questioning attitude de la Mare always voiced:

Here I fancy lies the hidden link between de la Mare's poetry and his prose. His was preeminently a *questioning* intellect. Article, introduction, letter or conversation, no matter where, his favorite sentence form was the interrogative. He questioned everything, including — or rather above all — the things that everyone round him had become quite sure about. But he rarely or never stayed for an answer.³

De la Mare believed, as already noted, that poetry always revealed the truth about the poet.⁴ It is interesting, therefore, to see what

can be deduced about his own philosophy of life from his poems. A casual perusal of *The Complete Poems* shows that he was not apparently very interested in what might be called socially significant poetry.⁵ The few poems of this kind are not particularly successful and, indeed, appear rather contrived (for example, 'In the Dock', 'The Suicide' and 'Drugged').⁶ These three poems appeared in *The Veil* (1921). This is a significant date in the history of the anti-romantic modernist movement, for T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock*, with his bald spot and rolled trousers, had appeared in 1917 and *The Waste Land* was to come in 1922. Could it be that de la Mare, in the centre of the writing world as he was, felt that he should attempt something in a similar realistic manner? He did not continue in this line, except for an infrequent poem like the satire on social life, 'The Feckless Dinner-Party'.⁷ But this poem is successful because, beneath its everyday, realistic, conversational form, runs a thread of mystery and terror, which is de la Mare's own distinctive mode.⁸

It is, however, with the deeper aspects of life — Arnold's 'buried life of one's own soul' — which man too seldom enters, that de la Mare was unusually preoccupied. He obviously did not think that this type of 'socially significant' writing was particularly important, and one can see why his poetic capabilities were only rarely, in his poetry for adults, turned towards the social or political events of ordinary life. Writing on the occasion of Thackeray's centenary, for instance, he said that Thackeray's novels were like a panorama of the social life of London: 'And yet what is the meaning of it all to the mind fretted by the deeper riddles of life?'⁹ Such a questioning attitude to these 'deeper riddles of life', which Barfield and so many other critics have recognised, is the most noticeable aspect of his poetry, at least of the

more serious kind.¹⁰ He expressed not the belief and certitude of a Vaughan or Traherne or Wordsworth, but rather the more modern thinking and doubting man's speculation on life and death and the nature of love. But, although his poetry limns no definite philosophical belief, he was conscious that serious inquirers 'demand of a poet a definite and explicit philosophy', and he said that 'the faith of a poet is expressed in *all* that he writes. He cannot, either as a man or as a poet, live without faith; and never does'.¹¹

One of his very early and uncollected poems shows his preoccupations clearly:

I marvelled at earth's glory, her grey seas
Which stretch in light in confines of the sky,
At her still mountains reared immovably,
The fear and wonder of her leafy trees;
Much more I marvelled, musing at my ease,
On man and all his curious history,
The scars and pangs of his antiquity,
The childlike splendour of his fantasies,

How, like earth's grass, he flourishes and goes —
His grief, his love, his passion, and his fear,
His ant-like labours, his sublime repose —
Yet finds no peace to be accomplished here.
O God, I said, who mewed me in this place,
How shall I through these dreams Thy realty trace! (CP629)¹²

This sonnet may be only an early, derivative exercise, but it is useful in a study of de la Mare's ideas. From it one can see, or can deduce, the important themes in *The Complete Poems*: the joy in nature, the emphasis put on childhood, the interest in time and the past, in fantasy and dream, the wonders, mysteries, griefs and terrors of life and love and death and, of course, the questioning attitude to the reality of God. This questioning attitude and these various themes appear, to a greater or less degree, in nearly all the genres of poetry in *The Complete Poems*. As to these genres, I cannot in this thesis attempt a detailed discussion

of de la Mare's poetry for children or his simple nature poetry or his humorous verse although, naturally, I comment on them in passing, as they all impinge on the serious poetry at times. But I would like to try and deduce from the rest of the poetry his philosophy of life — his ideas on, for example, love and on religion, in its wider meaning of spiritual faith and belief.

* * * * *

(2) LOVE

(a) The Visionary Face

In Chapter 8 (5), I shall be discussing one of the more important images in de la Mare's poetry — the visionary face. This image is closely connected with his main theme of the traveller and the journey (which will be discussed in Chapter 7), for this 'vision grave' is bound up with de la Mare's sense of exile and is one of the symbols he used for the ultimate homecoming — the journey's end and goal of life. It is also connected with de la Mare's idea of love and the search for the inner companion.¹³ In *Winged Chariot* he wrote of the soul's viewless associates:

And every soul draws ever toward its own
Viewless associates as it journeys on;
Is never less alone than when alone. (CP557, vii)

and in 'Lullay' of the lost one within:

For alas, love is mortal;
And night must come soon;
And another, yet deeper,
When — no more to roam —
The lost one within me
Shall find its long home,
In a sleep none can trouble,
The hush of the tomb. (CP466—67,iii)

The face or figure, which is nearly always that of a woman, has something cool and serene about it and seems to be a kind of statue figure. This is an image in keeping with the peculiar fascination the Victorians felt for the Pygmalion legend and the Hellenistic ideal of truth, feeling and nature, personified in what Swinburne described as their 'noble, nude antique sculpture'. This feeling for the Greek ideal is seen in the work of such great Victorians as Arnold, Swinburne, George Eliot, Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin and Pater. It is seen also in the Victorian painter Burne-Jones's paintings depicting the incarnation of the Statue woman and, indeed, in the poetry of the nineties poet Ernest Dowson, who wrote:

The jealous gods, who brook no worship save their own,
Turned my live idol marble, and her heart to stone. 14

In this connection, it must be remembered that de la Mare was himself a Victorian and may well have been influenced by such images.

This She, the vague face that usurps the cold of stone,¹⁵ may bring to mind also Shakespeare's statue woman, Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*. Her unveiling and apparent reincarnation in the climactic reconciliation scene, when she rejoins her lost daughter Perdita and jealous husband Leontes, seems to have a dual meaning. On the surface it is a natural family scene of love and forgiveness, but at a deeper level it may appear to have symbolic overtones of the love and peace which come at the end of life when man is reunited with the divine love which is his ultimate goal. De la Mare's grave vision seems to have this dual significance too — or a triple significance. It may stand for the human lover, the spiritual ideal of divine beauty and love, and it may be also the visualisation of Jung's archetypal *anima*.

We know that de la Mare was extremely interested in Jung's work, so that the *anima*, Jung's mediator between the conscious and unconscious

mind, could well be the basis for this image.¹⁶ Jung said that an inherited collective image of woman exists in a man's unconscious — a complementary feminine element — and that the *anima* represents the latent femininity in a man, for there are feminine and masculine elements in everybody.¹⁷ This archetypal image of woman only becomes conscious and tangible through the actual contacts with woman that a man makes during the course of his life. For many men the most important experience of woman is that of his mother. Later on the image is added to by the various women he is attracted to in life. We know that de la Mare lost his father when he was four and that his mother thus had, perhaps, a disproportionate influence on him. This could well mean that he came to have a great deal of feminine sensibility in his make-up, which might have been the cause of his desire for love and his romantic conception of love. This could also account for the fact that in much of his work and particularly in the short stories, he speaks through the medium of a female figure.¹⁸ In his idea that love, both physical and spiritual, is all-important in life, he shows what H. L. Mencken describes as a female attitude. Mencken believed that men, or at any rate the more masculine type of man, tend to dismiss love and sex lightly as an 'afterthought and a recreation'. For this type of man, woman is the 'principal joy of his hours of ease', and the relationship between man and woman is rather casual and superficial. He craves the approbation of his fellow-men more than that of any woman; while, for most women the love relationship is of paramount importance.¹⁹ De la Mare obviously considered it so himself, as can be seen from his anthology *Love*.

Some characteristics of this archetypal woman image, which Jung discussed, seem to remain constant through the ages and de la Mare's vision appears to correspond with them. The *ánima* has a timeless quality; she often looks young though there is a suggestion of years of experience behind her. There is something strangely meaningful about her, a sort of hidden knowledge, a secret wisdom. She is often connected with the earth or with water and may seem fairy- or siren-like. De la Mare's water midden in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, the cold, slim, ivory-white naiad in 'The Old Angler', the green and gold fairy in 'Sam's Three Wishes', and the aloof, remote, starry face with its 'eyes changeless and immortal and serene' of his 'The Vision', are all examples, in one way or another, of this archetypal 'She'.²⁰ This is the Eurydice, the Sleeping Beauty archetype — personified variously as ideal woman, wise woman, maternal woman, wicked witch and siren, or innocent child — in legend and fairy tale through all the ages, right down to the Victorian fantasy tales of George MacDonald and the more modern fantasies of, for example, C. S. Lewis, Mervyn Peake and J. R. Tolkien.²¹

These three latter authors, as well as the Victorians, Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald, form the subjects of a detailed study of modern fantasy by C. N. Manlove.²² This study is indicative of the growth of academic interest in the fantasy novel of quest and adventure in worlds created from the author's own imagination; and it has been paralleled by an increase in general public interest in the world of fairy, the supernatural and the fantastic.²³ This is perhaps accounted for by twentieth century scepticism and consequent lack of faith and loosening of corporate religious ties, accompanied by a curiosity about psychology and its allied sciences.

De la Mare, child of both the Victorian age and of the twentieth century, has a very strong element of the fantastic in his poetry and, if this aspect were to become better known and understood, it might lead to an increased awareness of and interest in his work by the academic critic and the general public. He was an extremely imaginative writer and it was his very free use of the imagination which, earlier in this century, was stigmatised by Leavis, Spender and the modernist critics as fancy, lack of realism and escapism.²⁴ Nowadays, when the workings of science are being revealed as ever more fantastic, and capable of providing exciting material for the popular genre of science fiction, we are perhaps coming to understand Martin Johnson's thesis that the sciences and the arts are *both* essays in the communication of the pattern or structure of mental images: 'The imaginary, the symbolic or the fantastic, may be vehicles of realist communication from poet to reader not inferior to those arts which confine themselves to the mundane or material'.²⁵ As de la Mare himself said: 'And tongueless truth may hide in fantasies'.²⁶

However, for fantasy to succeed in this way, a creative imagination and some simplicity of mind in the reader is required and, from the author, a rigorously disciplined form and pattern — what de la Mare called a 'wild reasonableness'.²⁷ The formal pattern of de la Mare's fantasy sequences is shown in his use of stanza, rhythm and rhyme and other such linguistic techniques, and also in the holism of his imagery, which has already been discussed. He believed that every original poet has 'to fashion for himself his own idiom, his own individual dialect, for the complete expression of his personality'.²⁸ His own language and imagery was probably partly based on his early love of fairy story and romance, nursery rhyme and ballad which were

told or read to him when he was a small child and which he continued to love when he grew up.²⁹ He was much influenced, for example, by *Gulliver's Travels*, 'one of the earliest books to make an impression on his mind', with its 'strange land where the laws of this workaday world simply do not obtain'.³⁰

In de la Mare's first volume of poetry, *Songs of Childhood* (1902), the poems seem essentially grafts from this early base of fairy tale. 'Sleepyhead' reminds one of Shakespeare's world of fairy in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*;³¹ 'The Gage' is in ballad form; 'The Pedlar' with its cruel edge, is a typical fairy-tale; 'The Pilgrim' a Romance of trial and quest; and 'Bunches of Grapes' a nursery rhyme jingle.³² The later book of rhymes for children, *Peacock Pie*, is also redolent of nursery rhyme. However, in volumes like *The Listeners*, *Motley* and *The Veil*, this very light fantasy takes on a deeper, more questioning note and the fairy tale impedimenta, mixed with the more adult concepts of Freud's dream symbolism, Jung's archetypes and de la Mare's own preoccupation with the meaning of dream, become more and more symbolical. He becomes then more a psychic poet, viewing our mysterious world through this supernatural symbolism — seeing the mystic element in Nature, unseen presences and magic and fantasy everywhere. What he wrote in a review of Feodor Sologub's fairy tales seems very relevant to himself. They,

like all fairy tales lead out into fantasy and back again into life. And they are never without a glint of satire, an amused shrug of the shoulder, regarding our odd and contradictory destiny in a muddled world . . . His stories are an extraordinary mingling of the simple and happy with the sinister and macabre . . . He is a dreamer. He is one of those strangers and pilgrims . . . who . . . are aliens in the world. They see amid the crowding blind. They discover only shadow and reflection where the sure and the substantive are loudly proclaimed. ³³

In this respect, de la Mare has much in common with George MacDonald (1824—1905), who was a forerunner of modern fantasy and who figures in Manlove's study. The reader of his *Lilith* and *Phantastes*, *The Golden Key*, *The Wise Woman* and his well-known fairy story *The Princess and the Goblin*, will be struck by the similarity of the symbols used by both these men. De la Mare quoted from his works in *Love* and *Early One Morning*, and it is probable that he may have known his fairy stories as a child when we consider that de la Mare was born in 1873 and that MacDonald was at the height of his career in 1865: *The Princess and the Goblin* was published in 1872, *The Wise Woman* in 1875 and *The Golden Key* in 1867. ³⁴

In *Phantastes* (from which he quotes in *Love*) the hero Anodos sets out eastwards to search for the Ideal and travels through a dream landscape peopled by symbolic figures, many of whom are aspects of the archetypal She — the wise and beautiful woman, or the contrasting wicked witch. This She appears in many guises. In Chapter I she is, first of all, a fairy — a tiny woman-form like a 'small Greek statuette roused to life and motion'. Then she changes to the typical beautiful pre-Raphaelite woman, dressed in a white robe, with pale face and large blue eyes and dark flowing hair. But she is two hundred and thirty-seven years old and so, at the same time, is the wise woman, the fairy godmother and the grandmother who also appears in *The Golden Key*, *The Wise Woman* and *The Princess and the Goblin* and in many of the old fairy stories, like for example *Cinderella*. ³⁵ In Chapter 5 of *Phantastes* this She is a statue — a lovely, reposing woman apparently of marble, enclosed in a block of pure alabaster. In both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* this woman figure is constantly changing and elusive. She can be the Princess/leopardess/cat woman in *Lilith*,

the wrinkled old woman with the young eyes, the mirror woman and the veiled statue in *Phantastes*.³⁶ Like de la Mare, with his picture of Mrs Taroone presiding over Thrae, George MacDonald also seems to have seen terrestrial nature as a maternal figure, a universal mother and spiritual guardian:

. . . Behind those world-enclosing hills
There sat a mighty woman, with a face
As calm as life, when its intensity
Pushes it nigh to death, waiting for him
To make him grand forever with a kiss
And send him silent through the toning worlds. 37

Many of the other symbols which George MacDonald used appear in de la Mare's work too. For example, the knight on horseback in his rusty armour in Chapter 6 of *Phantastes* may remind us of de la Mare's *The Traveller* and 'The Song of Finis'.³⁸ In Chapter 8, Anodos's shadow 'ranging up and down looking for him' could remind us of de la Mare's preoccupation with the 'inward companion', 'thou Shadow forlorn' in 'The Familiar'.³⁹ Other symbols which both men use frequently are the mirror, the horse, the cat, the cage; and, in the context of the archetypal journey, the river, boat, island, the moon, the open door or gate and the house and palace.⁴⁰

As with MacDonald, de la Mare's figure or face of the beautiful, mysterious woman is usually connected with love of some kind, though it is an ambivalent image and seems to combine both the spiritual and physical aspects of love. Because of its pure and statue-like appearance, there tends to be a lack of warmth and sexuality about it and, indeed, de la Mare has often been criticised for the lack of passion in his love poetry. Luce Bonnerot thinks that love is not one of his major themes. Duffin's view is, in contrast, that de la Mare's 'love-poetry stands with that part of his work which is most assured of immortality'. 'Of love as an infinite tenderness, unfading and

undying, the sign and seal of the perfect blending in perfect union of two spirits, I see in de la Mare the supreme master'.⁴¹ Although one may not agree wholeheartedly with such an eulogistic appraisal of de la Mare's love poetry, like a true romantic his feeling *is* primarily for tenderness in love. He repudiated Freud's idea of the exclusive role of sexuality in dreams and thought he degraded sex by reducing it to purely physical terms.⁴² He probably agreed with H. L. Mencken that 'the mystery of sex presents itself to the young, not as a scientific problem to be solved, but as a romantic emotion to be accounted for', and that 'innocence has been killed, and romance has been sadly wounded by the . . . discharge of smutty artillery . . . What is neither hidden nor forbidden is seldom very charming'.⁴³

Emily in 'An Anniversary' articulates de la Mare's tender, spiritual feelings about love:

I liked him beyond words to tell! As one likes — well, being one's self, and being happy. As one likes what has remained true and familiar and of one's very being ever since childhood. Also, I loved him. He was the all, the friend that I had never even dreamed of. Yes, have it all out now! There will be no other chance. Also, I was *in* love with him. Everything that that can imply, body, heart and soul. 44

He voiced again, lyrically, this idealistic attitude in *Love*:

Even though it lie beyond our own achievement, could we deny that a love in common thus begun, and thus continuing, adapting itself to the vicissitudes, the griefs and troubles, the struggles and disasters of life; a love in continual change as all things living must be; perpetually discovering its own resources; fighting its own weaknesses, constant in its strength; surviving its own excesses and defects; a love neither wearying nor waning; fed with the tributaries of every passing day, with its grief, gladness, hope, memory, disappointments, failures, partings, reunions, passion and peace; and still both concealing and revealing its secret fund of inspiration; a love which even death itself may stay but cannot conclude — if all this is taken into account, what else in human life, in all its fullness and inexhaustibility, can be compared with it? 45

Eloquent and romantic this passage may be, and it might draw sneers from many moderns; but it does show very clearly de la Mare's philosophy of aspiration to a perfect earthly love which may be a mirror for the Ideal for which man everlastingly searches:

Le poète sait que l'homme est condamné à vivre sa dualité d'être mortel, avec en lui cette aspiration à l'éternel et à l'absolu, que l'amour ne comble pas mais sans cesse renouvelle par les fulgurantes certitudes qu'il donne de leur existence. 46

This is the ideal love which de la Mare symbolised by the image of the face or vision in so many of what we may or may not call his 'love poems'.

Of relevance to de la Mare's image of the face and the quest of the divine ideal is his reference in *Love* to Jacob Burckhardt, whom he quoted as saying that the civilisation of the Renaissance treated love in two ways — as a sensual enjoyment and as a deep and spiritual passion of the noblest kind; and that there was an ancient belief that love 'is an original unity of souls in the Divine Being'. He also quoted from Max Picard: 'When two human faces contemplate each other then it is as if the soul remembered and could look back upon its divine origin'. Thus, later on in *Love*, de la Mare seems to throw a light on his choice of this particular archetypal image of the face. There is a possibility, he thought, of the existence in us of a remote 'reminiscence or "recognition" relating to an experience prior to this present life', and that we have an innate inclination for certain things. In his own case, he wrote, he was always looking for a certain face.⁴⁷ So it would be natural for him, when writing about his own private feelings of love, to use this ambiguous image to cloak his emotions, in the classic act of generalization and detachment. Why publish your secret heart, he asked — keep it in the background.⁴⁸ Human beings look to

love, not only to satisfy an earthly, sensual craving, but also often in a more spiritual way, for a sense of eternity and stability. And this is, perhaps, what we feel de la Mare was hinting at by his use of this hauntingly beautiful and peaceful symbolic face.

But, romantic though his concept of love may be, he did not disparage the role of the physical in love, nor deny the delight the body may bring: 'That love alone, which dominates but cannot and should not subdue the lust of the body but be a perfect fusion, serene in its fierce intensity, of both, is man's sole surety in a world cold for the most part in blood and stagnant in spirit'.⁴⁹ When we come across such passages in his reviews and note his admiration for D. H. Lawrence, prophet of the vital importance in love of the physical and the spiritual;⁵⁰ when we read his novels *Memoirs of a Midget* and *The Return*, and his short stories like 'The Green Room' with its poems of unrequited love, 'The Almond Tree' with its study of jealousy and extra-marital love, and others like 'An Anniversary' and 'At First Sight'; or a poem of passionate sorrow and yearning like 'The Ghost', we can have no doubt that the author was a man who had known all the many aspects of love.⁵¹ This opinion is reinforced by his own words; Poets are in general 'by their nature ardent and impetuous', and love can only be known about through actual experience.⁵² He believed that love is poetry's main theme and that it is the life-giving essence of poetry.⁵³ Yet we have seen previously that de la Mare felt strongly that the writer should not be too prodigal with the passions and that a poem should not inform of emotions; that, indeed, he did not think passion could be translated into good poetry, as he hinted in 'The Secret':

We gazed, enraptured, you and I,
Like children at a flower;
But speechless stayed, past even a sigh . . .
Not even Babel Tower

Heard language strange and close enough
To tell that moment's peace,
Where broods the Phoenix, timeless Love,
And divine silence is. 54

(CP458, iii,iv)

Yet passion may be there. 'Full tides that silent well may be/Mark
of no less profound a sea', he wrote in 'A Recluse', a poem which seems
to have an autobiographical flavour like its fellow 'A Portrait'. 55

To me, it seems that de la Mare is most successful in his love
poetry when he uses as the love image an incorporeal, impersonal,
spiritualized figure such as the lost inner companion, the distant,
elusive 'Vision' or a nameless ghost. When he does this, as for ex-
ample in 'The Cage', 'Thou art my Long-lost Peace', 'The Vision' and
'The Ghost', in spite of the apparent absence of warm humanity, he
does catch the true, bitter nostalgia in the human heart which lost
love brings. 56 Indeed, the note most commonly sounded in his love
poetry is the loss of the loved one, either actual or dreaded as in
'Foreboding':

'And then to stay. And wait . . . ' Alas!
I see you, silent in the grave
That rapes the heart of all it loved —
To miss, to mourn, to crave. 57

(CP624,iii)

This is so, even though he often articulates the romantic idea that
death cannot end love. 58 There is, as John Press says, 'a piercing
awareness of human desolation' in a poem like 'The Ghost'. 59 Such
a poem strikes to the heart of any reader responsive to that particular
romantic, nostalgic tone with as much poignancy as, for example perhaps,
Tennyson's 'Tears, Idle Tears' or Bishop Henry King's 'The Exequy'. 60
Like them it seems bound to survive as a fine expression of man's

universal experience of love and sorrow. Modern sentiment admires Thomas Hardy whose less 'poetical', more down-to-earth love poetry achieves a similar note of heartsick yearning. But Hardy often fails where de la Mare succeeds, in the mastery of poetic technique which adds linguistic evocativeness to semantic appeal.⁶¹ Both poets are capable of that simple poignancy which belongs to the world of the ballad. As with Housman, there is much of the ballad at the core of their poetry, especially that of de la Mare. We can see from his anthologies how many of the old ballads he knew and loved. In *Come Hither* he included a whole section on 'Old Tales and Balladry' and in his Notes he wrote of the old Scottish ballads:

Their enchantment has no match — the very strangeness of the words, the rare music, the colour and light and clearness and vehemence, and, besides these, a wildness and ancientness like that of an old folk-tune which seems to carry with its burden as many lost memories as an old churchyard has gravestones. 62

There is something of this ballad appeal in de la Mare's poem 'The Ghost'. One might say of it, in de la Mare's own words, that it has

that unity and completeness which is the outcome not only of a lucid conception but also of intense feeling . . . suddenly . . . will come a crooked twist of craziness, of witchcraft, the chill presence of a ghost in the cold of the world beyond life's twilight window, the sorrow of some remote unhappy memory, an echo of lament from a life long-ago and far-away. 63

De la Mare's love poetry is not, on the whole, overtly sensual or passionate, although he was a man who had obviously known passion in his personal life, as we have seen. It is basically of two main types, what one might call the romantic and the literary.

(b) The Romantic Love Lyric

The romantic love lyric is, like 'The Ghost', sad, melancholy and nostalgic and much preoccupied with the death of the loved one. A number of the poems of this type are clustered round 'The Ghost' in the

1918 volume *Motley*. There is, for example, 'Alone' with its melancholy refrain 'Alas, my loved one is gone, / I am alone; / It is winter'; 'Betrayal': (CP194)

Oh, but her beauty gone, how lonely
Then will seem all reverie,
How black to me! (CP198)

'The Cage'; and 'The Revenant':

Strange, strange, are ye all — except in beauty shared with her —
Since I seek one I loved, yet was faithless to in death.
Not life enough I heaped, so thus my heart must fare with her, 64
Now wrapt in the gross clay, bereft of life's breath. (CP199)

Such poetry has an ancient literary lineage. Compare de la Mare's poems 'Vigil' (CP205), and 'Unforgotten' (CP633), for instance, with Ronsard's sonnet 'Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle', Christina Rossetti's sonnet 'Remember', Yeats's 'When You are Old' and Ernest Dowson's 'In Tempore Senectutis' ('When I am old').

Although de la Mare's romantic love poetry has much in common with that of Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti, it seems at its best to contain a less personal, more profound perception of the sadness of the human condition. ⁶⁵ In this respect he has a closer kinship with Ernest Dowson, although he does not share as acutely in the Decadent pessimism of the nineties, and the life weariness and disillusionment which was such a noticeable feature of the poets of that period. ⁶⁶ Like Dowson, his poems are full of the nostalgia of unhappy or lost love and the longing for peace and sanctuary:

Oh, out of terror and dark to come
In sight of home! (CP24-26, xv)

he wrote in 'The Pilgrim'; while Dowson expressed his longing to retreat, in the Romantic manner, from the 'wild and passionate' world. ⁶⁷ Both poets used similar images of the innocent child, the face or vision,

and the journey. Note, for example, the resemblance between de la Mare's 'Vision' poems and this poem by Dowson:

Come not before me now, O visionary face!
Me tempest-tost, and borne along life's passionate sea;
Troublous and dark and stormy though my passage be;
Not here and now may we commingle or embrace,
Lest the loud anguish of the waters should efface
The bright illumination of thy memory,
Which dominates the night: rest, far away from me,
In the serenity of thine abiding-place! 68

Dowson has often been described as the typical 'decadent' poet in England and his 'Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae' as the typical 'decadent' poem.⁶⁹ But there is, in fact, also a romantic note in his recurrent theme of the tragic evanescence of love; and his interest in childhood and innocence is in line with the Romantics Wordsworth and Blake, as de la Mare's was.⁷⁰ He is, too, like de la Mare, preoccupied with the romantic ideal though, in his case, the ideal is shattered or unattainable, whereas de la Mare's Vision is ever-beckoning and, though fleeting and distant, can apparently be glimpsed occasionally. Compare, for example, the warm living quality of de la Mare's poem 'Twilight' to the very similar poem 'Epigram' by Dowson:

'Twilight':

When to the inward darkness of my mind
I bid your face come, not one hue replies
Of that curved cheek, no, nor the faint-tinged rose
Of lips, nor smile between the mouth and eyes:
Only the eyes themselves, past telling, seem
To break in beauty in the twilight there,
And out of solitude your very ghost
Steals through the scarce-seen shadow of your hair.(CP307)

'Epigram':

Because I am idolatrous and have besought,
With grievous supplication and consuming prayer,
The admirable image that my dreams have wrought
Out of her swan's neck and her dark, abundant hair:
The jealous gods, who brook no worship save their own,
Turned my live idol marble, and her heart to stone.

Dowson was interested in the French Symbolist poets and their theories of verbal suggestiveness and of poetry as incantation, and particularly in the impressionistic, musical singing quality of Verlaine, and the aesthetic idea of the single-minded pursuit of beauty for its own sake.⁷¹ De la Mare was only six years younger than Dowson and was probably writing his first poems and stories when Dowson was at the height of his fame.⁷² He must have followed with interest Dowson's technical innovations, his experiments and achievements in loosening of rhythm, which were important for modern poetry and have probably been underestimated. Both poets had a fine ear and a natural feeling for the music and rhythm of language; but they both also worked hard and paid attention to every nuance of technique, thus adding a high degree of artistic skill to their verbal inspiration.

Jung believed that this feeling for words is part of the deep creative instinct of the poet and arises from unconscious depths, and Coventry Patmore said that 'the musical and metrical expression of emotion is an instinct and not an artifice'.⁷³ De la Mare and Dowson have both written a number of poems which owe their success to that extra instinctual quality which Goethe called 'eine erschütterung', Ernest Rhys 'the clinching touch' and Housman the 'shiver down the spine', which finds its way 'to something in man which is obscure and latent, something older than the present organisation of his nature'.⁷⁴ Very often this special, unanalysable quality is apparent in poems of the utmost simplicity, for neither Dowson nor de la Mare, in their best poems, indulged in any Romantic 'fuzz of words' (as Browning called Swinburne's excesses of verbalism). Their finest poems are usually spare, concise and of an almost classic

simplicity.⁷⁵ How is it possible to say exactly what subtle juxtaposition of words, what phonological, grammatical and lexical pattern and unexpected departures from the pattern have, in combination, produced the poetic magic of such utterly simple lyrics as, for example, Dowson's 'Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam' and, on the same universal theme, de la Mare's much anthologised 'An Epitaph'.

Dowson:

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
Love and desire and hate:
I think they have no portion in us after
We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.

De la Mare:

Here lies a most beautiful lady,
Light of step and heart was she;
I think she was the most beautiful lady
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes; beauty passes;
However rare — rare it be;
And when I crumble, who will remember
This lady of the West Country? 76

(CP135)

(c) The Literary Love Lyric

Like Dowson, much of de la Mare's love poetry has a literary, bookish quality reminiscent of Elizabeth poetry. As if in contrast to the melancholy romantic lyrics they wrote, there is often a puckish, lighthearted air about such poems as Dowson's 'To a Lady Asking Foolish Questions', 'To His Mistress', and 'Soli cantare periti Arcades' ('Oh, I would live in a dairy'); and de la Mare's 'The Looking-glass', 'When Love Flies in', 'If' and 'Intermittent Fever'.⁷⁷ They may remind us of Lyly, Lodge, Peele, Greene and Drayton. Yet some of de la Mare's apparently conventional, derivative, charming

little songs contain an individual note of genuine feeling which puts them in the same class as Wordsworth's Lucy poems. Consider, for instance, the delicate three-stanza poem 'April Moon':

Roses are sweet to smell and see,
And lilies on the stem;
But rarer, stranger buds there be,
And she was like to them.

The little moon that April brings,
More lovely shade than light,
That, setting, silvers lonely hills
Upon the verge of night —

Close to the world of my poor heart
So stole she, still and clear;
Now that she's gone, O dark, and dark,
The solitude, the fear.

(CP211)

or 'She', with its echo of Francis Beaumont's 'On the Tombs in Westminster Abbey', and its poignant final lines:

'Lo! the all that me possessed! —
Thinkest thou I'm at rest?' 78

(CP623)

(d) His Broad Approach to Love

While de la Mare's attitude to love is, on the whole, thoroughly romantic, he is not sentimental about it, though one must guard against a false construing of the word. In a review of *Symbol Songs* by Mary Richardson, de la Mare warned that she was perilously poised on the edge of gush and emotionalism.⁷⁹ Yet, speaking to Brain he said: 'What is sentiment, and what is its opposite? Is sentiment a bad thing? After all, if a child gathers some flowers for its mother, that is sentiment. There is all too little of it nowadays. Is the opposite to sentiment cynicism, or lack of feeling, or pessimism?' 80

What Robert Lowell said of Laforgue is apposite here:

If he hadn't dared to be sentimental he wouldn't have been a poet . . . There's some way of distinguishing between false sentimentality, which is blowing up a subject and giving emotions that you don't feel, and using whimsical, minute, tender, small emotions that most people don't feel but which Laforgue and Snodgrass do. 81

De la Mare was compassionate and full of human sympathy, but he had a strong streak of realism which saves his poems often from sentimentality. This is seen particularly in his poems for and about children and in the stories which concern children. In 'The Funeral' the children were dressed up in black for the occasion, but were apparently quite unmoved:

Back through the fields we came,
Tom and Susan and me,
And we sat in the nursery together,
And had our tea.
And, looking out of the window,
I heard the thrushes sing;
But Tom fell asleep in his chair.
He was so tired, poor thing.

(CP44-45, iii)

In the stories 'The Almond Tree' and 'In the Forest', Nicholas and Robbie also deal with death in the same matter-of-fact and apparently hard-hearted way. When Nicholas found his dead father, he 'felt no sorrow, but stood beside the body, regarding it only with deep wonder and a kind of earnest curiosity, yet perhaps with a remote pity too, that he could not see me in the beautiful morning . . . I understood that he was dead, was already loosely speculating on what changes it would make'. Robbie showed a similar egotism when he said: 'I was glad my father was gone away, because now I could do just as I pleased'.⁸² De la Mare is a poet who 'understands how near to cannibals children are', and is therefore 'free from the danger of sentimentality'.⁸³

Although there is no autobiography in which de la Mare has aired his conception of love, he let fall many hints in his writings, particularly his anthology *Love* and the long introduction he wrote for it: 'From its first page, then, to its last, this book has had for its compass merely my own personal, defective and deficient idea or conception of love. On that, apart from indolence and ignorance, the choice of

its every poem, its every fallible statement has depended'.⁸⁴ Luce Bonnerot wrote of this anthology: 'De la Mare s'y montre éloigné de toute pruderie ou affectation, tendre ou ironique, doué d'un remarquable équilibre, vibrant toujours à tout ce qui est généreux, ému par toute vraie passion'.⁸⁵

His approach to love was broad; in *Winged Chariot* he wrote:

Nor is this *love* a jewel in one plane.
It many facets has: mind, soul; joy, pain:
And even a child may to this truth attain. (CP558,viii)

He felt it should encompass all objects and stated his belief that 'an ardent affection even for an inanimate object — from one's alley taw as a child to the ruins of the Parthenon, from a cowslip to the Sphinx — is of the same kind as even the deepest devotion to a fellow creature'.⁸⁶ The many aspects of love which interested him and which his anthology covered are shown in the various section headings. There are the expected romantic titles such as 'First Love', 'The Fever and the Fret', 'Love Thwarted and Unrequited', 'Love and Happiness', 'In Absence', 'Love in Grief' and 'Love after Death'. But there are also sections on love of nature ('Things Great and Small'), 'Children and Friends' and 'Divine Love'. In the Introduction there is a passage on 'The Degrees of Affection' which ranges over all the degrees of attachment covered by the word 'love'.⁸⁷ By including in *Love* extracts from Dostoevsky and Plato, he underlined his belief in the importance of a wide-ranging love and, at the same time, his Platonic leanings and, perhaps, the source of his image of the ideal beauty:

Love all God's creation, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love each separate thing. If thou love each thing thou wilt perceive the mystery of God in all; and when once thou perceive this, thou wilt thenceforward grow every day to a fuller understanding of it: until thou come at last to love the whole world with a love that will then be all-embracing and universal

When a man proceeding onwards from terrestrial things by the right way of loving, once comes into sight of that Beauty, he is not far from his goal. And this is the right way wherein he should go or be guided in his love; he should begin by loving earthly things for the sake of the absolute loveliness, ascending to that as it were by degrees or steps, from the first to the second, and thence to all fair forms; and from fair forms to fair conduct, and from fair conduct to fair principles, until from fair principles he finally arrive at the ultimate principle of all, and learn what absolute Beauty is. 88

Because of this wide and catholic selection of quotations in *Love*, it is not surprising to find that de la Mare's own poetry also embraces many of the facets of the concept of love. His poems are, in fact, much more varied in tone and subject matter than seems to be generally realised. Not only does he write on adult romantic love, but he also explores the love of adult for child and child for adult, as well as friendship and marital love; and the poems which reveal his love of nature can be amusing, satiric, tender or philosophical.

(e) Love of Nature

De la Mare tells us that he always wanted to be friends with animals and there is a feeling of genuine loving-kindness in such poems as his donkey poem 'Nicholas Nye', and chuckling affection in 'The Bandog'.⁸⁹ Nature in general occupied a very important place in his life, but he had no sentimental illusions about her or about man's relations to her creatures. In 'Dry August Burned' the child weeps for the dead hare lying limp and blood-blubbered on the table, yet asks at the end 'Please, may I go and see it skinned?'.⁹⁰ He hated cruelty to animals and showed a satiric acerbity, with which he is not usually associated, in the poems 'Tit for Tat', 'Done For' and 'Hi':⁹¹

Hi! handsome hunting man
Fire your little gun.
Bang! Now the animal
Is dead and dumb and done.
Nevermore to peep again, creep again, leap again,
Eat or sleep or drink again, Oh, what fun! (CP268)

He liked to watch nature's creatures, whether it be the nesting birds, the swallow, the robin, bat, spider, bee, badger, mole or beaver. ⁹²

His love of animals is also reflected in the affectionate pictures of Rosinante in *Henry Brocken*, the monkeys in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, and the mare in *The Traveller*. ⁹³

Following Dostoevsky's precept, he loved plants as well as animals — trees and flowers; also insects and 'each separate' and tiny thing of Nature, and he wrote poems about them. Particularly successful are 'The Snail', 'All But Blind', 'Seeds', 'The Fly', 'The Tomtit' and 'The Snowdrop'. ⁹⁴ His knowledge of flowers is seen in his long essay 'Flowers and Poetry'. Listen to him on the daisy: 'It remains: exquisitely, complexly, simply constructed; and in its marvellous ingenuity infinitely beyond the most perfect little thing of use or beauty ever made by man'. ⁹⁵ For de la Mare, as for Plato, the beauties of nature are to be admired and loved, as reflections of the Ideal and Divine Love. 'If the mere semblance of Life as it reveals itself in a flower is so overwhelming in its beauty, what must be the unveiled Beauty?', he asked. ⁹⁶

(f) Love of Children

De la Mare found also a mystery and beauty in small children and displayed his loving tenderness for them in such poems as 'The Sleeping Child' and the epitaphs 'Alice Rodd' and 'Timothy Blackstone': ⁹⁷

O Death, have care
Only a Childe lies here.
A fear-full mite was he,
My last-born, *Timothy*.
Shroud then thy grewsome face,
When thou dost pass this place;
Lest his small ghost should see,
And weep for me!

(CP754)

He wrote some charming lullabies too, like 'Lullay':

'Now lullay, my sweeting,
There is nothing to fear.
It is only the wind
In the willows we hear,
And the sigh of the waves
On the sand dunes, my dear.
Stay thy wailing. Let sleep be
Thy solace, thou dear;
And dreams that shall charm
From that cheek every tear.
See, see, I am with thee,
No harm can come near.
Sleep, sleep, then, my loved one,
My lorn one, my dear!' (CP466—67, iv)

He commented on the true, simple hush-song in his review of 'Lullabies of the Four Nations': 'The drowsier the croon of *l* and *m* and *n* and *r*, and *oo* and *uv*, the longer it can spin in unarresting repetition, the vaguer its half-imaginative nonsense, the better the lullaby it is'.⁹⁸ His own 'Lullay', with its simple rhymes, repetition, alliteration and assonance, fulfils these requirements well. He understood a child's fears of the dark, as he showed in 'Hark!':

'There's nothing behind the door ajar.
Stop breathing as long as you could,
You still wouldn't hear what you think you hear;
There's nothing to fear in what you fear —
Lying alone in the dark.' (CP422—23, ii)

He showed too that he remembered not only his own experience as a child of the 'stooping loving face' above his cot, but also his fatherly experience, when the lullaby does not work and 'a complacent paterfamilias peers down at his . . . burden only to meet in the faint shadow between waxen rounded cheek and brow the clear unswerving gaze of two dark and incredibly conscious eyes'.⁹⁹

This is a typical combination of the near sentimental cheek by jowl with de la Mare's sense of the ironic and the practical, so often a feature of his verse. In his poetry for children particularly, there is often an amusing juxtaposition of fantasy and everyday life, as in

for example, 'The Shepherd':

Was it childhood, was it sweetheart,
Was it distant isles and seas,
Day of Judgment, Harvest Home, or
Bread and cheese? (CP405)

In 'The Keys of Morning', while little Louisa sat at her bedroom window 'learning her task for school', she saw Death with his 'long lean sallow face' watching her across the street and seeming to beckon her to him with his golden keys; but when she peeped across from the half-opened door only a shadow lay where he had been. There is in the everyday scene 'the chill of ice, or the rational touch of snow'. 100

This combination of fantasy in a homely world is seen also in de la Mare's short stories. 101 In these, as already shown, he revealed his psychological apprehension of the world of the child, which argues also his interest in them, and his love for them. This interest is underlined by his long essay-anthology *Early One Morning: Chapters on Children and on Childhood*.

De la Mare was always able to remember his own feelings of love as a child. In *Early One Morning*, for instance, he described his misery when he thought he had been abandoned by his mother. The incident made such a strong impression on him that he described it three times — not only in *Early One Morning*, but to Russell Brain and in *Winged Chariot*:

Behind me voices drone, where sit at tea
My guardians, mindless of my misery:
'A silly homesick child! All fiddlededee!'
Footsteps approach; pass by. And still not She.
Could she forget? Not care? Forbear to come?
Illness? Ev'n death? Alas. My heart falls numb.
Gone then for ever — mother, peace, and home

So, in a flash, my heaped-up years I span
To fill *this* Now, as, with uplifted pen,
I match that child with this scarce-changed old man.

(CP590, iv—vii)

Of course his mother arrived to 'call for' him in the end.¹⁰² The episode may appear sentimental to some rational adult ears, but it does show how de la Mare remembered and understood the deep-seated love of an affectionate and imaginative child for his mother and the unfounded but terrible fears that may accompany such a love. In another poem 'Lucy', he remembered an ingenuous childish love of another kind, and a maidenhair bought with a child's 'few pence' as a birthday present:

I was a child then; nine years old —
And you a woman. Well, stoop close,
To heed a passion never told
Under how faded a rose! 103 (CP305—06,iii)

In his understanding of the child's intense and independent private life and in his honesty in portraying children without the Victorian idealised and sentimentalised conception of their innocence, de la Mare shows himself a modern, more in line with, for instance, Golding in his novel *The Lord of the Flies*.¹⁰⁴

(g) Love of Friends

In keeping with the capacity for love which is apparent in all de la Mare's writings, he was much loved himself. In *Tribute*, J. B. Priestley said that all his friends loved him, and Russell Brain wrote that 'W.J. enjoyed the company of young people, and they became devoted to him; and when any of them came with me the talk went on as usual, and they from time to time became the target for questions'.¹⁰⁵ Some of his friendships figure in his poems. There is the gentle, friendly chit-chat of his poem about Katherine Mansfield, 'To K.M.'; and the poems about his great friend Edward Thomas: 'Sotto Voce', where he described how Thomas introduced him to the song of the nightingale, and 'To E.T.: 1917', after he was killed in the Great War.¹⁰⁶ De la Mare,

questioning as always, found it difficult to reconcile the lifeless corpse with the living friend:

Cry on the dead: — '*Beseech thee! wake! Arise!*' . . .
Impassive waxen visage, fast-sealed eyes
Sunken past speculation or surmise:
And, for response, not even the least of sighs.

How, then, can he we knew and loved be *there*?
Whose every thought was courtesy; whose one care
To show his friendship, and to speak us fair:

Gentle and steadfast. Why, but three days since
We talked of life; its whither and its whence;
His face alert with age's innocence.
He smiled an *au revoir* when he went hence

(CP572, iv—vi)

(h) Marital Love

Duffin makes the point that some of our earlier poets 'knew all there is to know about love as a swift emotion', but that later poets like Hardy and de la Mare, have brought 'to love poetry all that is meant by life-long companionship, and the shattering pain of its termination by death'. These two poets, he thought, have turned 'from the outer courts of romantic love to its central shrine, which is domesticity'.¹⁰⁷ In de la Mare's case, particularly, this might be considered an exaggeration, but certainly he understood the closeness that can grow up between couples:

When two minds, a man's and a woman's, are in close and frequent association with one another — or two bodies for that matter — each, it seems, may be silently aware even of what may be secretly passing in the other's. They seem to play eavesdropper, not only to one another's thoughts but even sensations. 108

And there are glimpses of a tender, domestic love in such poems as 'To a Candle', 'The Glance', 'Be Angry Now No More', 'The Birthnight: to F';¹⁰⁹ and in 'But Oh, My Dear':

Hearts that too wildly beat —
Brief is their epitaph!
Wisdom is in the wheat,
Not in the chaff.
But Oh, my dear, how rich and rare, and root-down-
deep and wild and sweet
It is to laugh!

(CP480)

We have already seen how highly de la Mare prized the truly loving marriage, although he believed it is extremely difficult to achieve and realised that love cannot last for ever for ordinary men and women.¹¹⁰ To Russell Brain he said that he approved of marriage, 'but that is no reason why one should disapprove of unmarried. It seems to me more a question of convention than of ethics or morals'.¹¹¹ He would probably have agreed with Mencken who said that ^{it} is unlikely 'that I shall be exactly the same man in 1938 that I am to-day, and that my wife, if I acquire one, will be the same woman, and intrigued by the merits of the same man'.¹¹² In *Love* de la Mare wrote:

When it begins to waver and we to cease to care; when what we gave willingly is no longer ours to give; when the mysterious wellspring of love no longer flows — what then? We are promising to remain in a rare state of being which has befallen us unsought . . . Being human, our love too will depend in part on our continuing to be loved. That failing, it may not necessarily wane, but it will be less stable, and also of far less value to her to whom it was given. It may then become a tragic burden even to ourselves; and a love once really lost is past the *wit* of man at any rate to recover. 113

This is the situation round which de la Mare's story 'The Almond Tree' is built. The little boy, Nicholas, recounts the jealousies and unhappiness of his father's and mother's marriage, and his father's growing indifference to his wife and his growing love for another woman:

As we passed into the gloaming I saw my mother stoop impulsively and kiss his arm. He brushed off her hand impatiently, and went into his study. I heard the door shut. A moment afterwards he called for candles. And, looking on those two other faces in the twilight, I knew with the intuition of childhood that he was suddenly sick to death of us all; and I knew that my mother shared my intuition. She sat down, and I beside her, in her little parlour, and took up her sewing. But her face had lost again all its girlishness as she bent her head over the white linen. 114

The father could not solve his problems and went out one wintry night after a quarrel with his wife, to die in the snow.

This side of love's story is seen in several of de la Mare's poems. Take, for example, 'Be Angry Now No More!', 'Not One', 'Not Yet', 'Divided',

'Your Hate I See, and Can Endure, Nay, *Must*'; ¹¹⁵ and also in the last lines of 'The Bribe':

There is no power or go-between or spell in time or space
Can light with even hint of love one loveless human face.

(CP488—89)

In a few lines, in his epitaph 'Susannah Prout', de la Mare encapsulated all the contradictions inherent in the long-lasting companionship of marriage:

Here lies my wife,
Susannah Prout;
She was a shrew
I don't misdoubt:
Yet all I have
I'd give, could she
But for one hour
Come back to me. 116 (CP744)

(i) Romantic Love

Yet, when all is said, in spite of these rational attitudes, de la Mare was still, basically, a romantic in love, as we have already noted. He believed in love at first sight and described such a state in romantic terms:

In either case love has found out a way; and of a sudden, and to each in its own measure, what has hitherto appeared to be a state of mere existence has been transmuted into a state of life. . . . Earthly experience seems to have waited on and on for this one event, and now, in an instant of eternity, the hour has struck. Rapture and a divine melancholy, radiant hope shadowed by the humility of despair, struggle for mastery . . . and now the wondrous sun has come out. It was winter; it is Spring. 117

(j) Love in Death and Divine Love

'Nor can love itself admit the thought of death', said de la Mare. 'Every innate impulse of the heart, every instinct of that spirit rejects it, even although no evidence of the senses and no argument of the mind can refute it. This, surely, if only obliquely, implies what can only be spoken of as the divine'. ¹¹⁸ Like the Elizabethans who, as he said, 'brooded endlessly on the mystery of death', de la Mare was fascinated and,

as Graham Greene thought, obsessed by 'the most curious riddle of death'.¹¹⁹ In both his anthologies, *Love* and *Come Hither*, there are long sections on death, particularly in connection with love, and many of his own poems have the themes of love and death commingled as, for example, the poems in the story 'The Green Room', which were supposed to have been written by a young woman who had killed herself; and the epitaphs in *Ding Dong Bell*.¹²⁰ De la Mare's attitude to death, as I said before, was ambivalent. At one moment it is the terrifying grave and the limitless void, seen in poems like 'Outer Darkness' (CP492—494) and 'Dig Not my Grave o'er Deep':

Friends, I have such wild fear
Of depth, weight, space;
God give ye cover me
In easy place!

(CP746, iii)

121

At other times the 'ultimate dark', 'the endless rest' may give place to the hope of day, as in 'In a Churchyard':

As children, told to go to bed,
Puff out their candle's light,
Knowing earth's natural dark is best
Wherein to take their flight
Into the realms of sleep: — so we
God's summons did obey;
Not without fear our tired eyes shut,
And now await the day.

(CP607)

And death may be a gateway to the divine peace and ideal love which his Traveller found at the end of his journey. This welcome to Death, and the questioning note is more in line with Vaughan's in 'The World of Light':

Dear, beauteous Death! The Jewel of the Just!
Shining nowhere but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!

122

That de la Mare believed ultimately in that Divine Love, we may feel sure, in spite of his almost overwhelming doubts, fears and surmises.

The last section in *Love* is entitled 'Divine Love', and there are hints here and there of his belief in some kind of God, however chequered his faith may appear, as can be seen in the poem 'The Burning-Glass':

To very God who day and night
Tells me my sands out-run,
I cry in misery infinite,
'I am thy long-lost son.'
(CP463—64,vi)

In *O Lovely England* (1953), de la Mare's final collection, there is a poem entitled 'The Reflection', in which many of his favourite images appear — the fire-lit room, the cold night outside the window pane, the face, the mirror, the voyage and the light. The last verse embodies his belief in the inestimable value of love — love among human beings, and also the possibility of a compassionate, divine love:

Empty and cold is the night without.
From this fire-lit room I peer through the pane:
Of starry assurance the dark breathes not;
My own face only peers back again.

I know those eyes, that brow, that mouth —
Mask, or mirror, the all I have;
But if *there* lay the Ocean and mine were the ship,
Not such for its Master would then I crave:

But a close friend rather; since love's clear rays
Are the light that alone makes man's dust divine,
And like his, the Unseen's — whose compassionate gaze
May not even yet have abandoned mine.

(CP611)

CHAPTER 5

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE: FROM HIS POEMS II

He 'lived in perpetual interrogation of the unknowable, he made poetry of his questionings.'

'The more a man has read in certain authors, the more anxious he becomes to get at close quarters with the mind that made the books he likes.' *

(1) INTRODUCTION

The name of Walter de la Mare does not generally evoke, either amongst the general public or in academic circles, any suggestion of deep cerebration or intellectual philosophical thought. Meditation and dream, fantasy, speculation and wistful reflection, are the words more often used to describe his writing. Reading some of the critical discussions about him over the years, one gets the impression that whilst his 'manner' or technique receives much praise, his ideas — the 'matter' of his work — are not taken very seriously. The 'philosophy of life' on which his poems and, indeed, the body of his work is based, seems to have received little attention. This could well be expected from those critics who openly oppose the idea that his writings are of value.¹ But many of his adherents have reacted to his work with an often diffuse and fragmentary admiration which perhaps lacks an in-depth appreciation of the achievements of his intellectual maturity. For example, Alfred Noyes in 1956 (the year of de la Mare's death), wrote approvingly of his 'magic' and 'his child's heart surviving in a man', but could yet add that it was difficult to find a 'connected scheme of thought or opinion in the work of de la Mare'.² I suggest that this is untrue. Just as there is a definite connected pattern

to his imagery, so there is also a definite pattern of thought and idea throughout his poems and stories although this is interwoven with a dark thread of constantly shifting speculative beliefs and interrogations. But this dark thread is an essential part of that pattern.

Again, the somewhat derogatory word 'whimsical' is often applied to de la Mare's poetry, and the fairy-tale, nursery rhyme, romantic element in his earlier work is frequently stressed, rather than the deeper, more thoughtful, questioning tone which came later, particularly with *The Veil* (1921).³ This more serious attitude which can be detected even in some of the poems for children and in other seemingly light-weight lyrics, should be given prominence and is, indeed, given prominence in Luce Bonnerot's thesis on de la Mare, which is essential reading for any study of his philosophy of life. She reminds us of those critics who believed that de la Mare has been underrated, quoting particularly Priestley's 'De la Mare does not to my mind enjoy the reputation to which the quality and surprising variety of his work entitle him'; and Mégroz's dictum that 'his work . . . has a greater depth and range . . . than most people realize'.⁴ In more recent times, Charles Causley said in a BBC broadcast: 'The poems are delicate and very, very musical indeed, so musical, in fact, that it sometimes seems to me that they might suggest to people who don't read the poems carefully enough that there's really nothing underneath, but, of course, there's a tremendous amount there, tremendous amount of resonance'.⁵ John Lehmann wrote in 1979, too, that 'One day soon a big reassessment of de la Mare's achievement is surely due'.⁶

Luce Bonnerot went on to write:

Cette pensée originale était exprimée dans une langue qui pouvait paraître conventionnelle, précieuse et surchargée. Ainsi ceux qui, par tempérament aimaient la forme, n'étaient pas préparés à comprendre le fond, et ceux qui auraient pu comprendre le fond étaient déroutés par la forme et s'éloignaient.

And later:

A côté de son invention fertile et charmante, du jeu de sa fantaisie où le poète s'enivrait de mots ou se berçait de rythmes, de la Mare avait une imagination puissante, audacieuse même, qui explorait inlassablement l'univers, essayant de déchiffrer certains signes, aspirant à soulever le "voile peint" et à comprendre l'énigme de la condition humaine; essayant de retrouver l'unité cosmique que l'enfant sent tout naturellement. 7

These judgements get to the nub of the matter. De la Mare's undoubted technical brilliance — his manner — should not be allowed to overshadow the interest of his matter and its appeal to a universal sensibility, although it is sometimes couched in an overly poetical diction and traditional form. It is, of course, for each reader to judge whether this matter is of importance and relevance to himself, but there is room, too, for a judgement in an academic sense as to whether de la Mare's matter, combined with the excellence of his manner is not such as to make him an important poet. In this connection, Bronowski wrote that 'a poem has worth only because it has matter as well as manner. The worth may be a play between matter and manner. It may be a play in the matter which can take place only by virtue of the manner . . . without both manner and matter there is no poem'. 8

Through a thorough acquaintance with the whole of de la Mare's poetry a case can be made out that there is something quite exceptional and unique in the combination in his poetry of childlike wonder about life and the world, and the adult perception of life's problems and questionings — a Blakeian fusion of innocence and experience, of simplicity and mystery. 9 It is this characteristic, combined with his superb lyrical and technical gifts, which ought to assure de la Mare of a particular and honoured place in English literature.

(2) HIS QUALITY OF INNOCENCE-IN-EXPERIENCE AND THE FORMATIVE SOURCES

The quintessence of this aspect of de la Mare's genius — that is, the wisdom of the fool — can be seen perhaps in a poem like 'The Song of the Mad Prince' (CP187), which appears at the end of *Peacock Pie*, along with 'The Song of Finis' (CP188) and some other songs which are more adult and ambiguous than the rest of the poems in this book of rhymes for children. William Jay Smith showed his appreciation of such poems when he wrote about *Peacock Pie* that it was concerned with the ultimate questions of existence, and that 'The Song of the Mad Prince' becomes 'at once the voice of the child asking the impossible and of the adult reaching further back than one can reach, the voice of a universal unconscious'.¹⁰

Peacock Pie was originally divided into eight sections of which 'Songs' was the last.¹¹ Of these eight songs, 'The Song of the Secret', 'Dream-Song' and 'The Song of Shadows' are exercises (in the well-publicised de la Mare manner) in pure music — enchanting and seductive. They are all 'Sighing a beauty/Secret as dream'.¹² The delicate form of the poems, each different, is adapted to and harmonizes with the tenuous meaning, in the style of Shakespeare's 'matchless lyrics', which de la Mare so greatly admired.¹³ But 'A Song of Enchantment' shows this music deepening into a poetry with archetypal overtones, the archaism 'Widdershins' not just eccentricity but an essential ingredient in the creation of the atmosphere of the poem, which laments the loss of the primordial magic and ancient wisdom that belonged to the childhood of Man and his World:

But the music is lost and the words are gone
Of the song I sang as I sat alone,
Ages and ages have fallen on me —
On the wood and the pool and the elder tree. (CP186, iv)

This deeper tone culminates in 'The Song of the Mad Prince' and 'The Song of Finis' and reappears later on in 'Motley' (CP208—09) and 'The Fool's Song' (CP211).

Looked at closely, 'The Song of the Mad Prince' and these two other songs of the Fool (who is similar to Shakespeare's tragic but wise fool), are thematically linked by the image of the willow tree, as well as by the fool and by the preoccupation with death. In 'The Song of the Mad Prince' we have:

Who said, 'Ay, mum's the word'?
Sexton to willow: (CP187, ii)

in 'Motley':

Not simple happy mad like me,
Who am mad like an empty scene
Of water and willow tree,
Where the wind hath been; (CP209, vi)

and in 'The Fool's Song':

Never, no never, listen too long,
To the chattering wind in the willows, the night bird's song.¹⁴
(CP211, i)

These poems are important in a study of de la Mare, not only because they illustrate this strange and unique quality of innocence-in-experience, but because in them are distilled some of the many influences which went to the making of de la Mare as a poet. Similarly, some of the formative sources of his particular faith and philosophy as a man may be deduced from them. Mégroz said: 'The words of prophets and of fools often contain the same fundamental appeal to an unconscious wisdom in us'; and David Perkins, referring to 'The Song of the Mad Prince', wrote that de la Mare 'sometimes explored a daring discontinuity or irrationality, being willing even to verge on acknowledged silliness or nonsense'. And 'just because they may mean much or nothing, these poems may present in miniature the whole human situation'.¹⁵

The form of 'The Song of the Mad Prince' — that is, the interrogative dialogue — is part of what might be called the innocent component of de la Mare's poetry. It probably derives from childhood memories of nursery rhymes and riddle poems.¹⁶ The first two lines of stanza i seem to be an amalgam of the old rhyme 'Who Killed Cock Robin?' and the nursery rhyme 'Sing a Song of Sixpence':

Who killed Cock Robin?
I, said the sparrow,
With my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin. . . .

Who'll dig his grave?
I, said the owl,
With my spade and shawl,
And I'll dig his grave. 17

With which compare the question and answer of 'The Song of the Mad Prince':

Who said, 'Peacock Pie'?
The old King to the sparrow:
Who said, 'Crops are ripe'?
Rust to the harrow:
Who said, 'Where sleeps she now?'
Where rests she now her head,
Bathed in eve's loveliness'? —
That's what I said.

Who said, 'Ay, mum's the word'?
Sexton to willow:
Who said, 'Green dusk for dreams,
Moss for a pillow'?
Who said, 'All Time's delight
Hath she for narrow bed;
Life's troubled bubble broken'? —
That's what I said. (CP187)

The nursery rhyme component inherent in the 'song', the 'pie', the 'king', the 'birds' (blackbirds, not sparrows or peacock), and the 'crops' (rye) is all in:

Sing a song of sixpence,
A bag full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds,
Baked in a pie;
When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing;
Was not that a dainty dish
To set before the king? 18

There is also a folk legend and Biblical component — that of the passing of the seasons; the crops are ripe for harvesting, which is death. God carries away the children of men 'as with a flood':

. . . they are as a sleep:
In the morning they are like grass which groweth up.
In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening
It is cut down, and withereth. 19

There are numerous folk legends and much folk-lore attached to the gathering of the harvest — corn or rye — with the decay of autumn and the death of the year. 20

This is followed by the literary (the 'experienced') component of the song — the reference to Shakespeare's beautiful Ophelia, the Mad Prince's beloved, her death in the willow-edged stream and the grave-yard scene in *Hamlet*. 21

In 'The Fool's Song', which follows 'Motley' where the Fool laments the hideousness of war and the harvest of death it brings, there is evidence of de la Mare's knowledge of both classical and Teutonic myth, as there is elsewhere in his poetry. The 'old Toll-Woman' seems to be an amalgam of the classical figure of Charon, the ferryman of the dead, who received an obol from each of his passengers; Hel, the Teutonic goddess, who presided over the underworld; and the female Fates, represented as old women spinning the thread of life. 22

The children of men, their loves, their joys, their fears and tragedies, their Heaven and Hell, the 'troubled bubble' of their existence, and Time in whose enormous womb the whole cycle of life and death takes place — these are the inferential subjects of these poems. They are but a few of the many poems, including the later long poem *Winged Chariot*, in which de la Mare dealt with such important and universal themes. His cry was always 'What?' and 'Why?':

What, do you suppose, we're in this world for, sweet heart?
What — in this haunted, crazy, beautiful cage —
Keeps so many, like ourselves, poor pining human creatures,
As if from some assured, yet withholden heritage?
Keeps us lamenting beneath all our happy laughter,
Silence, dreams, hope for what may *not* come after,
While life wastes and withers, as it has for all mortals,
Age on to age, on to age? 23 (CP491)

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(3) HIS ATTITUDE TO RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL FAITH

(a) General

There is a pagan flavour about these poems that may have prompted Graham Greene's remark that de la Mare's obsession with death and spirits 'has never led him to accept — or even to speculate on — the Christian answer', and that 'our easy conscious Christian answers seem glib when opposed to his speculation'.²⁴ Neither Luce Bonnerot nor Wagenknecht agree with him. Bonnerot thought that, although there is a certain agnosticism at bottom, there are many poems where religious feeling is living and sincere.²⁵ Wagenknecht tells us that he had seen a letter from de la Mare which seemed to him to indicate that de la Mare's position was closer to Christian orthodoxy than Graham Greene had assumed, and he believes that the reviews 'contain a number of confessions of faith franker and more direct than can be found in his creative writing'.²⁶

In one of these reviews de la Mare shed some light on his own philosophy of life: 'Indeed, in life itself, is not our philosophy an attempt to elucidate and to arrange the chaotic; our faith an impulse, enforced by reason, to justify and make it significant, our art and poetry an effort to retrieve from it the untreachorous and incorruptible?'²⁷ In this connection he said also that 'all poems indeed . . . may be said to be devotional'.²⁸ Surely, de la Mare is a visionary who, like the

mystics, tried to discover another life, a 'fuller and wider aspect of truth'.²⁹

But, deeply interested as de la Mare was in the supernatural aspects of life, he was a practical visionary and, although he does not appear to have been a practising orthodox Christian, he lived by practical, Christian principles. He was what we call a good man, a kind man, loved by all. His own attitude to that now old-fashioned word 'virtue' can be seen in his early sonnet 'Virtue':

Spent, baffled, 'wildered, hated and despised,
Her straggling warriors hasten to defeat;
By wounds distracted, and by night surprised,
Fall where death's darkness and oblivion meet:
Yet, yet: O breast how cold! O hope how far!
Grant my son's ashes lie where these men are! (CP89, ii)

This poem may well seem to fore-shadow the arduous journey through life of his later poem *The Traveller*. Throughout all his work we can see also his hatred of cruelty and war and his antipathy to materialism, as in the poem 'Hard Labour':

This Prince of Commerce spent his days
In crafty, calm, cold, cozening strife:
He thus amassed a million pounds,
And bought a pennyworth of life. 30 (CP619)

If all these points are considered, that is: de la Mare's images and the ideas they reflect; his speculative and interrogative mode; his quality of innocence-in-experience and the sources from which it came (myth, saga, legend, fairy-tale, nursery rhyme, the Bible and literature); his interest in the supernatural; the visionary yet practical side of his nature, his anti-materialism; and his Christian virtues and principles; the question is bound to arise: what, in fact, was de la Mare's spiritual faith and philosophy?

(b) His Religious Scepticism

The impression gained from reading de la Mare's poems and stories is that he appears to have had a fundamentally religious temperament without being deeply emotionally involved in any particular religion or faith and that, overall, there was a heavy overlay of scepticism and questioning. Perhaps Theodore Maynard put his finger on de la Mare's attitude with more perception than Graham Greene when he wrote that he was 'a Christian, but not in the least theological; he may have no creed, but the Creed has made him'.³¹ However, in the absence of biography or autobiography, we cannot really know how strong his religious or Christian convictions were. His son Richard said that he certainly prayed and believed in God and immortality, though he did not go regularly to church.³² We may surely be entitled to think that de la Mare betrayed something of his own ambivalence about religion and his Hardy-esque speculations about God under the guise of Selina in his story 'Selina's Parable'.

Selina, so typical of de la Mare's little girls, dark and narrow-shouldered, with intense dark brown eyes, leans out of her window to watch the hens in the farmyard below and wonders if the farmer, who regularly dispenses food to them, is not a bit like God, and they like human beings in their attitude to him.

"Punctually they go to church (some of them), not attempting to guess, or not capable, I suppose, of really *knowing*, what for; but confident that the bishop or rector or somebody will be in the pulpit and they be fed.

"And then comes a day — Now what *is* the difference," mused Selina, contemplatively narrowing her inward gaze, "what is the real difference between Farmer Trepolpen and God, and between that fussy, forward . . . little Leghorn . . . and Me? Surely no: He cannot want me (He cannot expect me to go to church and praise and pray) simply for the sake of my wretched little hard-boiled bits of goodness. Does He really only think of us twice in twenty-four hours, like the tides, like matins and even-song, as — well, as I think of Him? "

Yet, she muses:

"Suppose there's someone, a kind of unseen circumspectious spirit, kneeling crunched-up there at a little square staircase window. Oh, ever so happy and dreamy and sorrowful and alone, and not in the least muddle-minded — omniscient, I *suppose*, though that, of course, must be omniscient, too — just staring down in sheer joy and *interest* at the farmer, and the sunshine, and the valley, and the yard, and the hens, and that delicious filthy duck-pond and — and the Atlantic, absolutely all *Its*, and . . . What wouldn't I. . . . ? " 33

Though Walter de la Mare did not go regularly to church, graveyards had a fascination for him, and apparently he could not pass one without going in. When Richard de la Mare was a child his father used to take them round the old Cornish churchyards and read out the inscriptions on the graves, whence no doubt he got his inspiration for *Ding Dong Bell*.³⁴ Those old tombstones must have nourished de la Mare's strong feelings about the purpose of life and its transience and the mystery and finality of death. For they show so clearly how, in the old days, whole families could be cut off early — mothers in childbirth, infants and young adults, presumably from infectious diseases and tuberculosis amongst other things. So, when little Miss M. sits in an empty church, do her thoughts there not perhaps echo those of de la Mare?

It was as if some self within me were listening to the unknown — but to whom? I could not answer; I might as well have been born a pagan. Was this church merely the house of a God? There were gods and temples all over the world. Was it a house of *the* God? Or only of 'their' God? In a sense I knew it was also *my* God's, but how much more happily confident of His secret presence I had been in wild-grown Wanderslore. 35

This feeling of alienation from God-in-a-church was echoed by de la

Mare in his poem 'Strangers':

Cold is this church,
Cold the high arches, cold
With dazzling light, and Oh,
How old! how old!

Under the hollow roof
The strangers' voices come —
'The night is dark, and I
Am far from home'. 36

(CP424, iv, v)

And he articulated his lack of a precise orthodox faith in 'The Burning Glass':

No map shows my Jerusalem,
No history my Christ;
Another language tells of them,
A hidden evangelist. 37 (CP463—64,i)

In 'The Tomtit', too, he seemed to abstain from stating his exact religious position:

Well, it were best for such as I
To shun direct divinity. (CP470,iv)

He accepted nothing as axiomatic, but brought forward now this, now that idea about life and death.

De la Mare was always sure about the beauties of nature, and that we must pay due homage to her and to her Creator. In 'Incomputable' he said:

Think you the nimblest tongue has ever said
A morsel of what may ravish heart and head?
Think you the readiest pen that ever writ
Has more than hinted at what makes life sweet? . . .
See, now, the stars that mist the Milky Way;
The hosting snowflakes of a winter's day;
Count them for tally of what life gives, thus shown,
Then reckon how many you have made your own! 38 (CP548,i,iii)

And, in 'Dust' (CP500), he cries to the 'Sweet sovereign lord' of Spring that it is beyond his power 'One instant of my gratitude to prove,/My praise, my love 'for all this beauty.

But he was never quite sure about that Creator, that God, or what man's position in the Universe is, or what the 'livelong tangle of perplexities' which is life, can mean. ³⁹ And, of course, for him, as has already been discussed, death wears many faces. ⁴⁰ De la Mare was ambivalent in his meditations on death and many of his poems show this questioning attitude, as in 'Self to Self':

If thou wake never — well:
But if perchance thou find
Light, that brief gloom behind,
Thou'lt have wherewith to tell
If thou'rt in heaven or hell. 41 (CP298,iii)

Is death a leap into nothingness, he asks, or is there a life here-
after and behind this world some ultimate Good? Perhaps, he suggests,
the soul has successive bodies and is on a 'prolonged journey of whose
beginning and end the self in its company may be not even vaguely aware'.⁴²
In *Animal Stories* he wrote: 'Life within us, life outside us, life
beyond us — there is no end to any of them until the life, that is with-
in us for earthly purposes, itself comes to an end: only to begin again,
as it is believed'.⁴³ In 'The Undercurrent' the world is pictured, in
a favourite image, as a 'haunted, crazy, beautiful cage', where man pines
for something which 'may *not* come after', yet where the 'one simple secret'
just might be 'That a good beyond divining, if we knew but where to seek
it, / Is awaiting revelation when — well, *Sesame* is said' (CP491—92,i,ii).

But always for de la Mare death was an unknown mystery waiting at the
end of life, 'A bridge, now nearing, I shall walk alone — / One pier on
earth, the other in the unknown'; and immortality but a dream.⁴⁴ He
poignantly expressed his reluctance in the face of death to leave behind
the beauties of the world: 'All that I loved I love anew, / Now parting
draweth near'.⁴⁵ In 'The Old Men' (1913), which is a forerunner, in
mood and tone, of T. S. Eliot's poem of 1925, 'The Hollow Men', he tells,
with brilliant concision, the tragedy of old age as death draws near:

And One, with a lanthorn, draws near,
At clash with the moon in our eyes:
'Where art thou?' he asks: 'I am here,'
One by one we arise.

And none lifts a hand to withhold
A friend from the touch of that foe:
Heart cries unto heart, 'Thou art old!'
Yet, reluctant, we go. ⁴⁶

(CP206,v,vi)

De la Mare's mind was, in a modern manner, open to all possibilities.
We may well believe that he put his own thoughts into the mouth of Mr
Blumen in 'The Connoisseur'. In this rather abstruse story, Death comes

unexpectedly to man, bird and serpent, separating each from their treasured earthly possessions and demonstrating how man is only a speck of dust in the great universal cycle.⁴⁷ In Part I, 'Park Street', Death appears to Mr Blumen in the guise of the old Saint Dusman, and he speaks of the journey they must make together:

"Ours is a longer journey, Mr. Blumen."

The dark eyes had sharpened. "It *has* a goal, then?"

"Surely!" replied the old man. "Were you uncertain even of that? Not," he added candidly, "not that the metaphor carries us quite all the way . . . But what — if I may venture — suggested to you that any journey in this world, in any precise meaning of the word, has an *end*?"

"Well," replied Mr. Blumen, "there are many philosophies, and one may listen to all without being persuaded to accept any."

"But hardly without divining any — just on one's own account?" returned the old man, almost as if he were smilingly bent on coaxing a secret out of a child. 48

Is this sentiment echoed in *Behold This Dreamer* where de la Mare remarked about life that 'in spite of all argument against it we believe that we *will* it to our own small purposes, and because we may divine in it a celestial design, we accept it more or less as it comes'?⁴⁹ Indeed, everywhere in de la Mare's work there is proof that he believed, or wanted to believe in a 'celestial design', in the spiritual nature of the universe. The ghosts he wrote about so often are surely symbols of his hope that the soul is immortal and that death is the gateway to another mode of existence:

Oh, ev'n should folly bring Man's world to woe,
Out of its ashes might a sweeter show.
And what of the life beyond, whereto we go?

Even were that of this a further lease
It yet might win to a blest state that is
Past thought — transcending scope of clock-time's bliss.
More simple, passionate, and profound than this.⁵⁰ (WCh. CP572, vii, viii)

But equally throughout his work there is evidence of de la Mare's questioning attitude to religion and life. This is well summed up in

'A Riddle'. In the first four stanzas he describes all the beauty of the earth in springtime — the budding hazel, the song of the chaffinch and the robin, the 'labyrinthine flight' of the butterfly, the sun's rays 'golden and fair' which give 'light and life' equally to the stone and to the poet's cheek. Then, in the last three stanzas, comes his Berkeleyian question:

. . . O restless thought,
Contented not! With 'Why' distraught.
Whom asked you then your riddle small? —
'If hither came no man at all

'Through this grey-green, sea-haunted lane,
Would it mere blackened naught remain,
Strives it this beauty and life to express
Only in human consciousness?

'Or, rather, idly breaks he in
To an Eden innocent of sin;
And, prouder than to be afraid,
Forgets his Maker in the made?'

51

(CP255,v,vi,vii)

It seems clear then that although in creedal matters de la Mare might appear to be rather indefinite, he believed in a Creator, a 'God' of some kind. With his contradictory ideas ever at war, this faith comes over in his writings in several different ways. He uses Biblical story and imagery, often in a mythic, archetypal way, without any obvious, fervent, personal religious involvement like, for example, the deep religious emotion seen in Vaughan and Traherne's poetry. This can be equated with his similar use of story and imagery from historical, legendary and literary sources.⁵² He seems sometimes to hold to a Hardy-esque theism which presents itself as a conception of a remote God, not (in his case) exactly uncaring, but aloof from man. He appears to believe strongly that there is a God-spirit in nature. And this leads him to the concept of a God-Creator, an unseen, mysterious Spirit pervading the Cosmos. De la Mare, in his role as Man, the Questioner, ponders upon

life and death and time, expressing rather than explaining the meta-physical riddle which has dogged mankind through the ages.

(c) Biblical Story and Imagery

It is usually accepted that the early childhood years are important in forming a person's convictions and attitude to life, although they may not actually affect his 'inward bent'.⁵³ De la Mare himself said that 'ten years of childhood . . . surpass a hundred of maturity. They have more influence on the mind and imagination than any that follow.'⁵⁴ It must not be forgotten, therefore, that de la Mare's first twenty-seven years of life were passed in the reign of Victoria and it is very probable that those vital ten years of his childhood were spent in a typical, orthodox, middle-class Victorian family setting. His father and mother were products of what Asa Briggs calls the period of high-Victorian England, whose key words were 'thought', 'work', and 'progress'.⁵⁵ His father died when de la Mare was four, but there is no reason to doubt that his mother, who had a great influence on him, ran a household any different from the typical Victorian household of that day. There would be an accent on church-going, the Bible, family prayers, the Victorian work-ethic and Victorian morality. There would be servants and probably a Nanny or nursery maid amid the surroundings which appear so often in the houses portrayed in his short stories.⁵⁶ His mother's story-telling and his own voracious reading were also, as I remarked earlier, very important aspects in the moulding of his poetic disposition.⁵⁷

Later, during de la Mare's years at St. Paul's Cathedral School, he must have been constantly in attendance at the Anglican Church services, listening to the lessons read from the Bible and singing Hymns Ancient and Modern. It is not surprising, therefore, that he became steeped in

this Bible-based religious material and that the stories and language of the Authorised Version formed for him, as it did for most people until the middle of the twentieth century, a kind of archetypal bed-rock — a cultural heritage — with, in his case, a superadded layer of nursery rhyme, ballad, legend and myth, from which sprang, unforced, the flowers of his imagery.⁵⁸ In 'The Universe' he wrote of the angels and fairies which played such a large part in his early poetry:

I heard a little child beneath the stars
Talk as he ran along
To some sweet riddle in his mind that seemed
A-tiptoe into song.

In his dark eyes lay a wild universe, —
Wild forests, peaks, and crests;
Angels and fairies, giants, wolves and he
Were that world's only guests. (CP92,i,ii)

As he grew older this material came to have for him a richer symbolism.

Yet, in spite of these early influences, de la Mare does not appear (as I have said) to have held, in adult life, rigorously to any specific orthodox religious position. But it might be said that, if the theological, churchy aspect attached to the word be removed, he was of a religious turn of mind and, in spite of his scepticism, the Christian values and Biblical imagery of his upbringing must have lingered in his heart and mind. He often wrote, for instance, of his admiration for the Authorised Version:

The Bible, it is said, is not being read nowadays so much as it used to be . . . This statement, if true, implies a loss beyond measure to mind and heart . . . its wisdom and divination, truth and candour, simplicity and directness. All that man is or feels or . . . thinks; all that he loves or fears or delights in, grieves for, desires and aspires to is to be found in it, either expressed or implied . . . and poetry dwells in it as light dwells upon a mountain and on the moss in the crevices of its rocks.

He continued: 'Remembrance of what the matchless originals in the Bible itself meant to me when I was a child is still fresh and vivid in mind'.⁵⁹

In his poetry this Biblical influence has two aspects. They are sharply divided into those of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament, just as the reading of the lessons is divided in the Anglican church service.

There are the poems which use imagery and story from the Old Testament or Revelation, and feature the Lord God of the Jews and their legendary history, in particular the story of the Garden of Eden, as in 'All the Way':

It's a long, long way to Abel,
And a path of thorns to Cain,
And men less wise than Solomon
Must tread them both again;
But those fountains still are spouting,
And the Serpent twines the bough,
And lovely Eve is sleeping
In our orchard, now. 60 (CP431,ii)

As de la Mare retells the stories of Eden, The Flood, Joseph, Moses, Samson and Saul and David in his *Stories from the Bible* in prose, so he recounts in poetry the encounter between David and Goliath and the story of Absalom. He refers to Noah, David, Elijah, Job and Solomon; and the influence of the apocalyptic book of The Revelation with its almost pagan symbolism, can be seen clearly in his work. The serpent Satan, the Angels, the River of Life, the Four Horses of the Apocalypse, Babylon, the Hebraic Lord God Almighty, the City of Jerusalem and the Last Judgement, all make their appearance. ⁶¹

Consider, for example, the poem 'Eureka', which few would recognise as being by de la Mare, where he translated the unearthly metallic splendour of Revelation, Chapter 21 about 'that great city, the holy Jerusalem', whose 'light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal', into a futuristic hell, presided over by 'God the Mechanist' — a picture more in keeping with Hardy or H. G. Wells:

Prodigious wheels of steel and brass;
And — ranged along the un-windowed walls —
Engrossed in objects of metal and glass,
Stooped spectres, in spotless overalls. . . .

'Here God, the Mechanist, reveals,
As only mechanism can,
Mansions to match the new ideals
Of his co-worker, Man.

'On strict probation, you are now
To toil with yonder bloodless moles —
These skiagrams will show you how —
On mechanizing human souls . . .'

(CP479—80,vi,x,xi)

Note, too, how de la Mare in 'A Dull Boy' imagines himself standing
before God the Judge on the 'great white throne' of Revelation, Chapter 20:

'And what did'st *thou*' . . . I see the vaulted throng,
The listening heavens in that dread array
Fronting the Judge to whom all dooms belong: —
Will the lost child in me cry bravely, 'Play'? 62

(CP456, iv)

On the other hand, the story and imagery drawn from the New Testament show an altogether different aspect of God. In the early poems there is a childish concept of Jesus, echoes perhaps of early teaching at his mother's knee: 'The words of my mother came back to me out of a far-away morning: "He made us of His Power and Love "'⁶³. When Miss M. and Mr Anon talk about God, and he cries that God is in all Nature, Miss M. says: 'Can you see Jesus Christ in these woods? Do you believe we are sinners and that He came to save us? I do. But I can see Him only as a little boy, you know, smiling, crystal, intangible'.⁶⁴ This Jesus of de la Mare's is the Jesus of a child's bed-time prayer — the Jesus that A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin prayed to, Charles Wesley's 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild', Mrs Mary Duncan's 'Jesus, tender Shepherd' and Walter J. Mathams's 'Jesus, friend of little children'.⁶⁵ He appears in de la Mare's early poems 'The Ogre' and 'The Christening', and in the later poems 'Before Dawn' and 'A Ballad of Christmas'.⁶⁶

Sometimes, as Spenser mixed his religion with the world of fairy, de la Mare mixed his worlds of the Bible, nursery rhyme, legend, classical myth and science, for example in *Winged Chariot*:

Immeasurable aeons ere the sun
Sprayed out the planets, as a fish its spawn,
Clotho her fatal tissue had begun

Which lured you to this instant. And, know this:
Eve fell; the King looked up; cock crew; ywis
Woe, of a moment, was the traitor's kiss.

(CP578,vii,viii)

But, on the whole, de la Mare's God in his more adult poetry seems to be less the 'gentle Jesus' and more the Creator, an impersonal, immanent God like Hardy's. It is interesting that de la Mare, in a review, quoted from Hardy's poem 'The Last Chrysanthemum':

— I talk as if the thing were born
With sense to work its mind;
Yet it is but one mask of many worn
By the Great Face behind. 67

(d) Hardyesque Theism

De la Mare's parents grew up in the High-Victorian period when most people had a firm and comforting belief in Christianity and the Bible, in their personal immortality and in an anthropomorphic God and His divine providence. De la Mare himself, however, was part of that later Victorian scene, when clever young men were finding it difficult to sustain the orthodox religious beliefs of their up-bringing. They were following in the footsteps of men like Clough who, in the face of growing scientific speculation and the impact of Darwinist determinist materialism, were beginning to discard the traditional faith in the Bible and the Church. But they were more sceptical even than Clough for, as Walter Houghton remarks, men in the High-Victorian period still thought that there were ultimate truths in religion.⁶⁸ The seeds of the critical spirit — that disposition to ask 'Why?' — which gradually

became apparent during the years of Victoria's reign and were so obvious in de la Mare and other young authors of his time, were sown by the eighteenth century philosophers Voltaire and Hume and the Victorian Bentham, the great questioner.

De la Mare was a clever boy and an avid reader, and all these new ideas must have had their impact on him as he grew up and started to write.⁶⁹ The nineties was a period of great variety, both in philosophy and in literary styles.⁷⁰ With the decline of the traditional belief in God and the Bible, some writers, like G. K. Chesterton for example, turned to a more intense personal religion to provide stability; some, like the Decadents, attacked the accepted moral, ethical and social standards of their time, and held that art was superior to nature; some became atheists or agnostics or deists, and some sought God in nature or took refuge in the inner life of the imagination, like de la Mare.

It was Hardy perhaps, amongst all these writers at the turn of the century, who seems to have had the greatest influence on de la Mare, as he has had on so many modern English poets.⁷¹ They had much in common although, on the surface, their poetry is so different.⁷² Both were lonely figures in modern English poetry, refusing to be deflected from their own attitudes. They sat by themselves, different and unique, and cared only for their craft. Herbert Read described de la Mare as 'a poet who has always led his life in wise remoteness from our coteries'.⁷³ Both grieved over man's sufferings and the transience of life, but insisted on the importance of love. Their scepticism and questioning attitude seems to have doomed them both never to achieve a coherent faith. 'I have been looking for God for fifty years', said Hardy.⁷⁴ Yet they both seem to have felt that there is some kind of a God who

presides over the world of nature and apparent reality. Neither were
atheists.⁷⁵ Of the two, Hardy was nearer to the Deist philosophy of
the absentee God and the rationalistic denial of His revelatory nature.
He went to church, but his rational intellect rebelled against his old,
churchy childhood beliefs.⁷⁶ But always, in the midst of his brood-
ing melancholy, his waiting in 'unhope', the longing to believe is
there.⁷⁷ In his poem 'The Oxen', he describes how, in his youth, he
used to have no doubts of the truth of the nativity scene, but now:

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel

'In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom, 78
Hoping it might be so.

De la Mare greatly admired Hardy and wrote several reviews of his
work.⁷⁹ In 'Thomas Hardy's Lyrics', he quoted liberally from the
poems (for example, 'Nature's Questioning' and 'God-Forgotten'), to
show how Hardy railed against the God he felt had forgotten mankind:

Poem after poem reiterates that this poor scene of our earthly life
is 'a show God ought surely to shut up soon', the 'unweeting dream-
work' of some vast Imbecility, that spends eternity in passive reverie
or remorse, that framed this planet in jest and abandoned it to hazar- 80
dry. 'That I made Earth, and life, and man It still repenteth me.'

De la Mare echoed this feeling sometimes, as for example in his story
'The Vats': 'My friend and I had sometimes talked of the divine Aban-
doner; and also . . . of It. Here was the vacancy of His presence.' 81
But he seems to blame Man more than God, as in 'The Scarecrow':

. . . Oh see, Old Adam, once of Eden! Alas! 82
How is thy beauty fallen: fallen thine Eve,
(CP463,v)

De la Mare's God seems more benevolent and caring than Hardy's and,
amidst all the scepticism and questioning, his old childish beliefs

appear to have been retained more strongly in his heart. He wrote of the compassionate Unseen in 'The Reflection':

. . . love's clear rays
Are the light that alone makes man's dust divine,
And like his, the Unseen's — whose compassionate gaze
May not even yet have abandoned mine.
(CP611,iii)

In spite of such poems, however, de la Mare, like Hardy, was constantly trying to puzzle out the mysterious relation between God and nature and man, and he could well have written Hardy's lines in 'Nature's Questioning':

Thus things around. No answerer I. . . .
Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
And Earth's old glooms and pains
Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.

We might say of him what he said of Hardy: he is 'too imaginative a philosopher to venture a final answer to the great riddle. He asks and asks.' 83

The clearest sign of Hardy's influence on de la Mare is seen in his story 'Selina's Parable', where he compares God to the farmer who dispenses food regularly to his little flock of hens: 'Without so much as a glance of compassion or even of heed, he trod heavily down the stone steps through the assembled hens, careless to all appearance whether his swinging, cumbrous boots trod the more eager underfoot . . .'. When the farmer inadvertently leaves open the door of the barn where the food is kept, the hens go in: 'Yes, they had climbed up, lured on by sheer indifference masquerading as generosity . . . only to discover — nothing, just cool inner darkness and odoriferous vacancy.' 84 But where, for Hardy, heaven is indifferent or hostile and God as uncaring as Selina's farmer, de la Mare's heaven appears much more often to be a sun-lit after-life, mirrored by the beauty of Nature on earth. This Nature and, indeed, the Cosmos may be, for him, pervaded by a Divine Spirit or

presence — not exactly uncaring, but rather impersonal. And it is in Nature, whose veil hides God-the-Spirit, that Man can sometimes catch a glimpse of this immanent, mysterious force of Being. Hence de la Mare's idea that Heaven or Paradise is within us or around us, as he describes in 'The Spectacle':

And Heaven? That daybreak vision?
In the peace of our hearts we learn beyond shadow of doubting
That our dream of this vanished kingdom lies sleeping within us;
Its gates are the light we have seen in the hush of the morning,
When the shafts of the sunrise break in a myriad splendours;
Its shouts of joy are those of all earthly creatures,
Their primal and innocent language — the song of the birds. 85

(CP461—62,ii)

The natural beauty of England, therefore, whose countryside he so much loved, was for de la Mare 'the earthly foreshowing and foreshadowing of . . . paradise'. 86

(e) God in Nature and the Immanent Presence

Everywhere in de la Mare's work shines his love of nature, although he was not deeply versed in country lore like his friend Edward Thomas. 87 This aspect of his poetry was a legacy from his Romantic literary kinsfolk of the early nineteenth century and was also one of the ways in which he resembled his contemporary Georgian colleagues, who were well-known for their celebration of the gentle beauties of the English countryside. Some of de la Mare's best-known and frequently anthologised poems show this love of nature, for example, 'The Scribe' (CP217): 'What lovely things / Thy hand hath made'; and the poem which follows it, 'Fare Well' (CP218): 'Look thy last on all things lovely, /Every hour.' But it is also seen in many of his less well-known poems and in his stories, novels and reviews. 'Nature is a standing marvel', he wrote in *Early One Morning*. 88 In a very early sonnet, 'Bright Life' (CP80),

he told of his 'rapture of life's dwelling-place!'; and in 'The Spark' he listed the common things of nature which he found so lovely:

The petalled daisy, a honey bell,
A pebble, a branch of moss, a gem
Of dew, or fallen rain — (CP313,iii)

The Three Mulla-Mulgars is full of delicate and poetic descriptions of nature, particularly of the moon-silvered landscapes of night-time. And the whole of his novel *Memoirs of a Midget* is almost overcharged with Miss M.'s rapturous response to nature. He imputed to Chardin (who, as de la Mare remarked, never painted 'hill or valley, sea or shore'), what must have been his own sensuous response to nature:

His senses and imagination cannot but have revelled in the flawless beauty and variety of nature — grass, trees, wood and water, rain and rainbow, ice and snow; in the radiance and loveliness lavished on the earth by sun and moon; daybreak and evening and starry winter dark. 89

Not only did de la Mare love nature's varying landscapes, but also her 'live, willed things', especially the tiny ones — 'the smooth-plumed' birds; the butterfly and moth; the fly, the mouse, the rabbit and the mole. He was fascinated by the snail and its convoluted shell, the spider's eye and the 'prowling, black-orbed, disconsolate' queen wasp.⁹⁰ He also admired, as I said before, the intricate structure and beauty of the human body, itself a part of nature. Brain told how de la Mare kept a human skull (which Edward Thomas had sent to him), in a Viennese cake-box and called it Moses; he thought it beautiful and unexpected.⁹¹ In Nahum's round tower in *Come Hither* there was a skeleton; and in an early sonnet 'Anatomy', de la Mare traces with his fingers on his own face 'Each arch and prominence and hollow place / That shall revealed be when all else is gone', seeing 'the skull beneath the skin'.⁹²

The episode about Edward Thomas and the skull is authenticated in the unpublished correspondence between de la Mare and Thomas. In 1908

Thomas wrote: 'Would you really like a skull . . . I wonder what you will make of it. Will you really see Helen's eyes?' ⁹³ Later, probably in the same year, Thomas wrote a letter (undated), obviously in reply to a query from de la Mare, which has a bearing on his view of nature:

You ask me to define Nature. I used it vulgarly for all that is not man, perhaps because man contemplates it so, as outside himself, and has a silly belief that Nature is only a house, furniture etc round about him. It is not my belief, and I don't oppose Nature to Man. Quite the contrary, Man seems to me a very little part of Nature and the part I enjoy least. ⁹⁴

Of course, Edward Thomas was not a gregarious man, which accounts for that last phrase; de la Mare differed from him in that respect, although he too liked his solitude. But it does seem that de la Mare shared something of Thomas's feeling about nature, or was influenced by it.

De la Mare constantly referred in his poems to man as dust — 'that Prince of the Dust — a man'; not superior to, but an integral though unique part of Nature:

Oh, when this my dust surrenders
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again . . . ⁹⁵

(CP218,ii)

But he also pictured man as an intruder in Nature's world: amid all the flowers and herbs which have their own livelihood on this earth, moves 'A stranger, named Man'. ⁹⁶ Nature is independent from Man, even hostile. This is the attitude which underlies de la Mare's portrayal of Thrae, the house of Earth, and its mistress Miss Taroone or Nature in *Come Hither*. Thrae is not just for the boy Simon. It stood there before he discovered it and it will stand there long after he has gone, for it is just a part of the even older history of the Universe (Sure Vine) and the planets (Ten Laps). The sight of Miss

Taroone never 'failed to alarm' Simon. She had 'clear cold eyes . . . in which I seemed to be of no more importance than a boat floating on the sea'. ⁹⁷ This personification of Nature is further developed in

Behold This Dreamer:

Nature, inscrutable mistress of her vast household, even although man assumes himself to be her fairy godchild, shows him a fickle favouritism, destroys him if he ignores her, and is indulgent only if he obeys to the last iota her every edict, her every whim. She *is*; she perpetuates herself; as if she herself were bemused and in a dream — with her seasons, and her weather, her greenery and stars and her multitudes; creating, destroying, never at rest. ⁹⁸

As Luce Bonnerot so succinctly remarks: 'L'homme qui met la graine en terre n'est pas le maître de la plante qui pousse'. ⁹⁹

This aspect of de la Mare's feeling about Nature has in it something of both Hardy and Housman. Hardy, who called himself an agnostic, felt (as previously noted) that God is not particularly interested in man, and Nature, though lovely, is indifferent and aloof, conscienceless and inscrutable. In his poem 'At a Bridal', he dares to question 'the Great Dame whence incarnation flows', but her answer is that 'she does not care'. ¹⁰⁰ In 'Hap' he says there is no design in nature, only 'Crass Casualty'. Housman, too, the courageous pagan, felt that Nature is beautiful but indifferent: and he, like Hardy, longed for revelation but found none. ¹⁰¹ In 'Tell me not here, it needs not saying', he calls Nature 'the enchantress', but she is also 'heartless, witless nature' who

Will neither care nor know
What stranger's feet may find the meadow
And trespass there and go,
Nor ask amid the dews of morning
If they are mine or no.

De la Mare also pictured Nature as a divinity:

So, we may ourselves in our rarest and happiest moments perceive in what we call a flower or a bird, or in the face of a child, indeed in anything deeply admired or loved, Nature herself, no automatic robot-of-all-work but a divinity — the emanation of our own minds — ageless and serene; ¹⁰²

and as indifferent and inscrutable:

"Not that Nature, as we call her, even in the most congenial surroundings, is the sort of old family nurse that makes one's bed every morning, and tucks one up with a 'God bless you' overnight. Like the ants and the aphides and the elvers and the tadpoles, she produces us humans in millions; leaving us otherwise to our own devices. We can't even guess what little stratagems for the future she may be hiding up her sleeve. We can't even guess". 103

In *Poems* (1906), de la Mare included a number of lyrics (some grouped in close proximity to each other), which are of a quite different tone from the transitional blank verse poems and sonnets in this collection. These lyrics, such as 'Come', 'They Told Me', 'Sorcery', 'The Miracle', 'Voices', 'Evening' and 'Echo', show that de la Mare felt that busy Nature was distinct from man and was indifferent to him.¹⁰⁴ She could be not only beautiful, but also poignantly melancholy and even frightening; and her landscapes, through which man strays, are full of unseen presences and whispering voices. It seems that in her, de la Mare felt, was variously manifested pagan Pan or religious God, or some Immanent Will.¹⁰⁵

Among these lyrics listed above, 'Echo' (CP94) shows perhaps most simply and successfully this idea of Nature's indifference, her sometimes alarming aspect, and de la Mare's feeling that she is peopled by beings other than man. Compare, too, 'Evening':

O, what an arch of light now spans
These fields by night no longer Man's!
Their ancient Master is abroad,
Walking beneath the moonlight cold:
His presence is the stillness, He
Fills earth with wonder and mystery. ¹⁰⁶ (CP91,iv)

Both Forrest Reid and Vivian de Sola Pinto quote 'Echo' in its entirety and de Sola Pinto remarked that it admirably embodied 'the bewilderment and despair of an age which had lost the traditional dues to the labyrinth of the inner life'.¹⁰⁷ The poem might equally reflect the

terror and questioning of the child-in-man in face of the mystery of Nature which gives him no special understanding or place. Or it may portray only the simple fear of a child alone in a dark forest, like the Babes in the Wood or Hansel and Gretel.¹⁰⁸ The fact that it was grouped in *Poems 1901 to 1918* (1920) under the title 'Memories of Childhood', gives some credence to the latter interpretation but, as so often with de la Mare, it can be read on several levels.¹⁰⁹

'Echo' is certainly a good example of the view expressed by Edward Thomas that Man is only a little part of Nature, and it also shows de la Mare's idea that there are other creatures in the universe unseen by Man. As he said of Thomas Hardy, his is a world 'whose borders are astir with the spectral'.¹¹⁰ Many of the poems in de la Mare's later collections continue to stress this belief of his that spirits, good and bad, are all about us in the world of nature and, if our sixth sense was better developed, we would be more conscious of them.¹¹¹ There is a little group of poems in *Inward Companion* which shows this preoccupation: 'The Vacant Farmhouse', 'Flood Water', 'Haunted', 'The Others' and 'Company'.¹¹² In 'Haunted' he wrote of 'the listening dark' and in 'The Others' of 'unseen company' which 'haunts with loveliness this silent night'. A typical short poem of this kind in dialogue form is 'Which?':

'What did you say?'
'I? Nothing.' 'No? . . .'
What was that sound?'
 'When?'
 'Then.'
'I do not know.'
'Whose eyes were those on us?'
 'Where?'
 'There.'
'No eyes I saw.'
'Speech, footfall, presence — how cold the night may be!'
'Phantom or fantasy, it's all one to me.'¹¹³
(CP385)

De la Mare also appears to have shared in that ancient belief which is so strong in, for example Greece, that there are spirits of place, an idea which is connected with a feeling for the long-lastingness of the land — what the French call 'la perennité'. He wrote of 'the ancient belief that chace and stream, rocky sea-coast and unpeopled valley may be haunted by divine presences, whether or not we think of them as dryad, siren, naiad, or are content with a far less evocative phrase, "the spirit of place"'.¹¹⁴ There are many of these pagan creatures in de la Mare's symbolic world — naiads and nereids, Pan and Cupid, and also more sinister ghosts and whispering voices akin to La belle Dame sans Merci and her train, 'their lips laid sidelong, their eyes aleer along the smoothness of their flutes'.¹¹⁵ This is like his friend, Forrest Reid's 'Greek view of nature': 'To the Greek one bond united all mortal beings, their rights were equal, they shared the common life, for all there was the same uncertainty in the present, the same questionable future'. 'In wood and river and plant and animal and bird and insect it had seemed to me there was a spirit which was the same as my spirit'. It seemed to him that 'a mysterious and deep understanding . . . had existed in that far-off age between man and nature'.¹¹⁶ For de la Mare man is a part of the antiquity of nature, but his life is brief against the mythic background of her eternal hills and woods and streams, as he wrote in 'All That's Past':

Very old are the woods;
And the buds that break
Out of the brier's boughs,
When March winds wake,
So old with their beauty are —
Oh, no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose.

(CP116—17,i)

Very old are we men;
Our dreams are tales
Told in dim Eden
By Eve's nightingales;
We wake and whisper awhile,
But, the day gone by,
Silence and sleep like fields
Of amaranth lie. (CP116—17,iii)

It is obvious from de la Mare's poems that he believed not only that there are spirits and ghosts in the world of nature, but that there is some overall divine spirit, some God in nature and behind the universe, although he oscillated between different conceptions of the exact nature of this spirit and often seems to contradict himself. But, as he himself wrote about Hardy, 'not ours the arrogance to reconcile on his behalf a poet's contradictions'.¹¹⁷ Sometimes he even seems to reject this theism in favour of a belief in a vast nothingness, a 'chaos of vacancy':

- (i) Somewhere there Nothing is . . .
- (ii) But Nothingness made no reply
- (iii) . . . into Time's enormous Nought
- (iv) Charged with his challenge into Space: 118
And quiet did quiet remain.

But, in *Winged Chariot* he concluded that there is a God, a Creator, a Mind presiding over the universe:

And never in Matter, surely, shall we find
Aught that is wholly inconsonant with a Mind
That thus conceived, evoked, informed its kind?
Else to forlorn Unreason we are confined. (CP573, vi)

It seems that de la Mare's ultimate attitude to this Creator-God has less in common with Hardy and Housman than with his Romantic forbears, Blake and Wordsworth. There is no hint of God in Housman's beautiful landscapes; man's existence is a scientific accident, a brief episode on an insignificant planet, a gathering of dust which

will soon be dispersed to 'the wind's twelve quarters':

From far, from eve and morning
And yon twelve-winded sky,
The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither: here am I.

He conformed to the outward observances of the Church of England, but had no faith in its tenets.¹¹⁹ Hardy, although not an atheist like Housman, presents a view of life generally grounded in pessimism; just sometimes he shows a glimpse of hope and an occasional tenderness, as in 'The Darkling Thrush':

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware. 120

De la Mare, on the other hand, though often despondent and melancholy, seems in a wry way to be more optimistic. As he said: 'Men are for the most part happier than they can account for; are optimists in practice and in spite of their reasoned convictions'.¹²¹ Although he was achingly conscious of the 'transiency of earthly dust'¹²² his God appears more benign than Hardy's, as can be seen in 'The Vacant Day':

I listened; and my heart was dumb
With praise no language could express;
Longing in vain for him to come
Who had breathed such blessedness

On this fair world, wherein we pass
So chequered and so brief a stay;
And yearned in spirit to learn, alas, 123
What kept him still away.

(CP215,iv,v)

In his sonnet 'Anatomy' (CP79), he contemplates his own face, thinking of the destruction of his flesh which death will bring. But he can write: 'How much death does and yet can do no more', as though the

bony skull which will remain after death may give us hope that something else of man, too, may remain — a symbol of the immortal spirit which will resist decay.¹²⁴

There is a good deal of Blake's ideas about Man and Nature in de la Mare's thinking and most critics have remarked that Blake had an important influence on him. Luce Bonnerot notes that, after Shakespeare, Blake was the author most quoted by de la Mare in his anthologies.¹²⁵ It is possible that behind his favourite image of the Inner Companion, the Vision, the Face, de la Mare had in mind Blake's views that there is no transcendent God, that everything that lives is holy, and that the living 'Universal Man' is himself God. Hence his quest for the inner companion, the 'Vision' which has been lost by Man after his psychic disintegration, his 'Fall'. This may explain the significance of the episode in *The Traveller* when he gazes into 'an immeasurable well' and sees 'a presence',

Rapt, immaterial, remote; ev'n less
In substance than is image of the mind;
And yet, in all-embracing consciousness
Of its own inmost being; elsewhere blind:

Past human understanding to conceive;
Of virgin innocence, yet source of all
That matter had the power to achieve
Ere Man created was, ere Adam's fall. ¹²⁶

(CP515,vii,viii)

For both Blake and de la Mare the only hope for Man is to return to his original, undivided condition in the 'Golden Age', which he knew in childhood, when Man was at one with Nature. They both believed that man can gain access to an understanding of things beyond the reality of the material world by the creative power of the imagination, which Blake called 'the Divine Vision';¹²⁷ and that, in dream, man can find the

primordial images (Blake's 'ever Existent Images') of the collective unconscious, which nourish that life-saving imagination. As Blake said: 'Man's Perceptions are not bounded by Organs of Perception; he perceives more than Sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover'.¹²⁸

This emphasis on the vital and almost religious power of the imagination was an important preoccupation of the Romantic school of poets. Coleridge called it the Soul of poetic genius and 'the living power and prime agent of all human perception . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM';¹²⁹ and Wordsworth referred to it as a 'glorious faculty'.¹³⁰ In this respect de la Mare, whose intense imaginative power has been recognised on all sides, is in the true Romantic line. We have already seen how often, in his reviews, he refers to imagination as vitally important, especially in connection with man's apprehension of nature and her beauty: 'That sovereign sense of the profound loveliness and significance which imagination gives to the world around us —'.¹³¹ It is interesting to note that Edward Thomas wrote to de la Mare in this same Romantic vein about imagination, although he remarked that he himself had none:

But I feel sure it is beyond what is called reality, that it is something fit for and even aware of infinite and eternal things . . . I think it may be found to be life itself . . . that it is what enables us to feel and know the Divine in all things, is itself the divine to which the rest of the universe responds according as we have or have not cut off our communication by pampering flesh and mind. 132

This idea of the 'Divine in all things' reflects Wordsworth's concept of a spirit or spirits presiding over nature and the universe — 'Wisdom and Spirit of the universe', as he calls it in *The Prelude*.¹³³ He described this 'underpresence', this 'sense of God' as:

. . . . a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. 134

De la Mare shared Wordsworth's awareness of this immanent presence. What are the lovely phenomena of nature, he asked, but 'mysterious meeting-places, greetings, between ourselves and the all?' 135 In his poem 'The Snowdrop', he tried to express his feeling that man can meet this 'All', or whatever name it may be given, through his contemplation of the simplest beauty of nature:

Now — now, as low I stooped, thought I
I will see what this snowdrop *is*;
So shall I put much argument by,
And solve a lifetime's mysteries. . . .

And though in vain — no mortal mind
Across that threshold yet hath fared! —
In this collusion I divined
Some consciousness we shared.

Strange roads — while suns, a myriad, set —
Had led us through infinity;
And where they crossed, there then had met
Not two of us, but three.

(CP321,i,vi,vii)

But de la Mare did not have Wordsworth's apparent certitude about divinity in nature, and there is in his poetry none of Wordsworth's Miltonic resonance or his feeling for a sublime and visionary presence in a *moral* universe as seen in his description of the climbing of Snowdon and his meditations thereafter. 136 Wordsworth's affective and optimistic vision of a Deist universe fitted to human needs, and of nature's benignity, finds little echo in de la Mare. 137 In other ways, however, there are affinities between them.

Both are highly responsive to the beauty of nature and the miracle of ordinary things. Wordsworth described his 'pure organic pleasure'

in the landscapes of his childhood¹³⁸ and, like de la Mare, he retained this joy when a man:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A Rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a Man.

De la Mare showed the same simple, child-like wonder and joy in his 'The Rainbow':

I saw the lovely arch
Of Rainbow span the sky,
The gold sun burning
As the rain swept by.

In bright-ringed solitude
The showery foliage shone
One lovely moment,
And the Bow was gone. 139 (CP10)

For both of them the beauty of nature was always a consolation. Wordsworth turned to the 'sylvan Wye' from the 'fever of the world';¹⁴⁰ and de la Mare said that it was his experience that 'whatever the care and worries and miseries of the outer world of man may be, even one quiet minute spent in looking out of the window at the sunshine and passing cloud and green things growing . . . may be an unfailing yet inexplicable correction and consolation'.¹⁴¹ Both were conscious of nature's duality, seeing alike her beautiful and terrifying aspects. For Wordsworth, as he made his way through the gloomy Simplon Pass,

Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end. 142

But Wordsworth's apocalyptic view of nature and the terrible, awe-inspiring spirit behind nature — majestic and sublime — is very different from de la Mare's conception. Victoria Sackville-West, when discussing the quality of mystery, which she felt was an essential

facet of de la Mare's art, said that 'our gentle poet . . . is really a dark angel in disguise', and that he is a poet of terror, of alarm, of the unexplained and the unknown.¹⁴³ But this fear and terror which he felt in the face of nature was not the solemn terror of Wordsworth but more the primitive fear of nightmare, or the menacing fear, the eeriness and mystery of the fairy-tale which, as he said, may be 'touched with the sorrowful and the forlorn, and tinged with dread and horror'.¹⁴⁴ Familiar landscapes give rise to disquieting thoughts; there are muffled sounds and stealthy movements, eyes which gleam and peer in the darkness, the dramatisation of typical infantile fears of the dark, 'that sinister dusk'.¹⁴⁵ Amid the 'dangerous shades' of this life, man is surrounded by 'foreboding dark as night', the fear of death and 'the cold unknown':¹⁴⁶ He expressed this in 'I Sit Alone':

Yet life is a dread thing, too,
Dark with horror and fear.
Beauty's fingers grow cold,
Sad cries I hear,
Death with a stony gaze
Is ever near.

(CP286—87,ii)

(f) Man's Life in a Cosmic Perspective

Although de la Mare was akin in these various ways to the Romantic poets, he had his childhood roots, as I have said, in the Victorian age, and the peak of his poetic output was in the twentieth century. These source elements pertaining to more recent times cannot be ignored. His scepticism, which meant that his mind was open to all possibilities, his interest in the new sciences, in psychology and dream, in archaeology and astronomy, led him into perhaps an unconscious modernism.¹⁴⁷ However, his intense imaginative force (which

is still often thought to be reactionary in face of the modern demand for realism), coupled with his sometimes archaic poetic diction, and the traditional form in which he so often cast his poems, combine to give him now an out-of-date image. Many think that his poetry never developed beyond the romantic lyricism of his best collections, *The Listeners* (1912), *Motley* (1918), and *The Veil* (1921).

Certainly, the volumes of poetry published in de la Mare's old age — *The Burning Glass* (1945), *Inward Companion* (1950), and *O Lovely England* (1953), (*The Fleeting* (1933) and *Memory* (1938) being, I believe, transitional), give the impression of having been composed of the detritus of poems for the most part written much earlier, but uncollected, with a few recent additions. In fact, the 'Author's Note' to *O Lovely England* says: 'Many of these pages were written years ago, some of them as far back as the second decade of this century'.¹⁴⁸ Because of the chronological problems occasioned by this, it is difficult to speak about the poet's development in the lyrical field, though these later volumes show, I believe, a falling-off in power. It does seem, however, that W. H. Auden was right in detecting 'a steady, patient and successful endeavour to eliminate the overly arty diction'.¹⁴⁹

It seems possible that in the years following the publication of *The Veil* (1921), de la Mare was primarily occupied with his prose writings and his anthologies and that he devoted his main poetic energies to *The Traveller* (1945), his romantic spiritual testament, and to *Winged Chariot* (1951), which one might call his modern spiritual testament.¹⁵⁰ According to his son, Richard, he was extremely interested in the problem of time and worked on and off over many years on this last long poem — a stylistically brilliant meditation on life and

time which blends the romantic 'poetic' manner with the modern conversational mode and modern imagery.¹⁵¹ It is in these two poems and particularly in *Winged Chariot*, that one can see how de la Mare changed and matured over the years which followed his lyric peak, 1912 to 1921. They do not appear to be at all well-known, but it is particularly through reading them that it may seem possible to agree with Auden, who described de la Mare as 'a poet who continued to mature, both in technique and wisdom, till the day of his death'.¹⁵²

The two poems show not only a difference in style, but also in thought. *The Traveller* is in the Romantic manner of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and depicts a symbolic journey through the dangerous 'Waste Land' of life towards the revelation of the divine light. In spite of the ambiguity of the ending, where the traveller's rest seems to be only the 'all-welcoming grave' — the 'pure radiance' of the sun, the Traveller's 'babble of praise and prayer' and the words, 'A son of God — no sport of Time or Fate', imply that his journey will end in heaven, Man's paradisal home.¹⁵³ This is a basically religious conception. On the other hand, the impression given by *Winged Chariot* is of an altogether less religious philosophy. Where *The Traveller* has overtones of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Winged Chariot* is twentieth century in its apparent setting of the life of man in a cosmic perspective. After reading it, William Kean Seymour wrote in his review that one cannot now say de la Mare is not modern, and that it is the most complete discussion of time in modern poetry.¹⁵⁴

The poets of the twentieth century scientific age who have been unable to accept some comforting religious explanation of the cosmos,

have been tormented by the questions presented by the problems of Time and Space and man's apparently puny role in the cosmos. Is there some unknown Force, they ask, or some supreme Mind or Spirit behind the unimaginable vastness which modern science has revealed, or is there simply a Nothing which the fact-bound human mind is incapable of understanding or even conceiving? It is in this respect that de la Mare was very much a twentieth century man himself. He never ceased to ask questions about the nature of the universe and man's life within it. *Winged Chariot* encapsulates all these questions and his speculations about possible answers. It is his attempt to reconcile the old and new philosophies; but he does not express any dogmatic solutions, nor formulate any creed. He seems resigned to being unable to elucidate the riddle. This 'strange, absorbing, baffling world' is 'a mystery past divining' — the work perhaps of 'an inconceivable Creator'.¹⁵⁵ He expresses his uncertainty in 'What?':

What dost thou surely know?
What will the truth remain,
When from the world of men thou go
To the unknown again?

What science — of what hope?
What heart-loved certitude won
From thought shall then for scope
Be thine — thy thinking done? (CP290,i,ii)

De la Mare remarked to Russell Brain that it was strange that 'we should boggle at the miraculous when we are surrounded by so much that we don't understand in ordinary life'. 'He agreed that one's attitude to miracles depended upon one's conception of God, and said: "God is like an element, all-pervading, like the air."' ¹⁵⁶ In fact, throughout *Winged Chariot* he presented the two arguments, of rationalistic unbelief and of imaginative belief in some sort of God or

presiding Spirit. The modern, scientific, rationalistic belief is on the lines of Sir James Jeans's words:

In the same way we believe that the universe is not a permanent structure. It is living its life, and travelling the road from birth to death, just as we all are. For science knows of no change except the change of growing older, and of no progress except progress to the grave. So far as our present knowledge goes, we are compelled to believe that the whole material universe is an example, on the grand scale, of this . . . The material universe appears to be passing away like a tale that is told, dissolving into nothingness like a vision. The human face, whose intelligence dates back only a single tick of the astronomical clock, could hardly hope to understand so soon what it all means. Some day perhaps we shall know: at present we can only wonder. 157

With which compare in *Winged Chariot*:

Merely material things hark back again
To their unknown, unknowable origin;
As, to death-darkening gaze, the world of men. (CP569,viii)

Scientifically speaking, the destruction of the world is dependent on the swinging of the moon and it may be overwhelmed haphazardly at any moment:

Engirdling the great World these waters flow,
To charred wan moon obeisant, to and fro.
But swang she nearer? . . . Chaos and overthrow:
Which of our marvels then were left for show

Of all Man's pomp and power? . . . (CP570,iii)

Man, apparently such a wondrous creature and 'strange prodigy', yet lives comparatively but a second in the evolutionary scene before falling to dust like all else. ¹⁵⁸ In a fine poem, 'The Corner Stone' (CP245), de la Mare wonders 'Toward what eventual dream' the cold, sterile stone sleeps on, when the creatures which lived their busy lives round it have gone 'into ultimate dark', 'And even of man not a shadow remain / Of all he has done?'. He presents the scientific evolutionary theory in a single stanza in *Winged Chariot*:

Once did the tiny shrews lemurs beget;
And they the tarsier, starred with eyes of jet;
And that the wistful little marmoset:
At length came Man; with Fate for martinet.
And *Time*? How could it else but aid, abet? (CP571,vii)

And, immediately afterwards, the other possibility:

Still, there was other route. One no less free:
A virgin, visionary Earth to see,
Seed of supreme potentiality
Of man with God and love at peace to be. (CP571,viii)

But he does not say which solution he would choose. Always the words he used were 'might', 'may', 'if' and the subjunctive 'were', and of course the inevitable interrogatives are sprinkled everywhere.

Imaginatively de la Mare wanted to believe in a God — a 'strange Mind', a 'mind supreme', 'some unknown Source' — and wanted to believe that Man's spirit will transcend the limits of time and space.¹⁵⁹ There is always in his poetry a strong sense that he believed there is more to life than everyday reality; that we touch the hem of this strange world through dream; and that the gate called Death, which swings open to what seems unimaginable nothingness, could be the gate to our greater knowledge of what lies beyond. Like Shelley he appears to feel that man's life is bound up with a spiritual force from the cosmos, a Power that 'dwells apart in its tranquility', as Shelley said in 'Mont Blanc':

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep, — that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live. — I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? 160

Though de la Mare was aware of most of the facts of scientific reality, his imagination laughed at the scientists who think the gleaming stars, 'Night's clear candles', are but 'pits of boiling gas'. He could not sing if he thought he was just 'mere matter on a rotatory Ball'. When

he is communing with nature he *knows* that his imagination is leading him to the right answer.¹⁶¹ As Luce Bonnerot says: 'Il a compris que l'homme ne vivait pas seulement de raison, et qu'il était lié par *l'imaginaire* à tout un héritage humain pas encore déchiffré'.¹⁶² A solitary bird seemed to him an 'Envoy and symbol of a past within me / Centuries now at rest'.¹⁶³ Man is at once modern man and ancient Adam, and everything is a part of some indivisible pattern which we cannot visualise or understand.¹⁶⁴ We are 'Waiting on what we cannot comprehend'.¹⁶⁵

But not even in this last great poem of de la Mare's old age, *Winged Chariot*, with all its learning and meditative wisdom, does he present us with a 'right answer'. There is in it no fully and logically defined elucidation of his philosophical and religious beliefs — merely mingled aspiration and resignation. How could there be an answer when his mind was so open to all possibilities: we could not expect it. *Winged Chariot* is a contemplation on Time because, for de la Mare, the immensity of Time was the great riddle, as it has so often been for serious poets, more especially in this modern, scientific age:

Time was; Time is: Time is not, runs the rune.
Hasten then. Seize that *is*, so soon begone. . .

Time 'real'; time rare; time wildfire-fleet; time tame;
Time telepathic, out of space, and aim;
Time starry; lunatic; ice-bleached; of flame;
Dew-transient, yet immutably the same;
Meek-mild as chickweed in a window-frame. (CP563,vi,viii)

Although de la Mare could not answer the riddle, he maintained that man has his place in the cosmos. He rejected the old Newtonian physics which said that if you want to understand you must take things to pieces, in favour of the modern physics, which takes an holistic

ecological view of the indivisibility of the universe and says that you cannot isolate its parts. In 'Self to Self' he wrote:

Maybe, when reasons rule
Dunces kept in at school;
Or while mere Logic peers
Sand-blind at her bright shears
Snip-snapping this, and this,
Ay, on my soul, it is —
Till, looking up, thou see
Noonday's immensity,
And, turning back, see too
That in a bead of dew. (CP298,ii)

For de la Mare man's tragedy is that he is perpetually cutting himself off from the cosmos of which he should be an integral part through his communion with nature. In 'The Assignation', he recorded how once when 'Felled with sickness' he had a vision of an old white horse with 'Eyes blue as speedwell', who seemed to him to be the 'secret symbol' of such a communion.¹⁶⁶ Man's best hope, he felt, is to try and re-establish his ancient links with nature and to seize hold of the only thing that seems real to him — the actuality of his consciousness of ephemeral nature, especially if significant and beautiful for him — until Time, his enemy, brings death at last. In his long poem 'Dreams', he wrote:

Our restless senses leap and say,
'How marvellous this! — How ugly that!'
And, at a breath, will slip away
The very thing they marvel at.
Time is the tyrant of their fate;
And frail the instant which must be
Our all of actuality. (CP347—53,xxvi)

Perhaps this attitude is most concisely expressed in another poem of his entitled 'Evening':

The little cirque, horizon-wide,
Of earth now swiftly draws away,
Though fulling moon aloft doth ride
Into the sun's perpetual day.

Little? It's all I have. For space
Than time itself's no less confined:
Its only being is what has place
At pin-point moment in the mind.

All history, knowledge, wisdom, power,
All man has said, or done, or made —
As transitory as a flower —
For me on this scant thread is stayed.

The all, the one; their better and worse,
Interdependent ever remain;
Each instant is my universe;
Which at a nod may fade again.

At the last slumber's nod, what then? (CP371)

The concision and simplicity of this poem is typical of de la Mare's best work, and surely the parallelisms of the final stanza and the question with which the poem ends, sum up all de la Mare's ambivalence about the metaphysical riddle of life and death.

PART II

THE POETRY OF WALTER DE LA MARE: IMAGERY AND TECHNIQUE

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CHAPTER 6

IMAGERY I: GENERAL DISCUSSION

'If there are to be ideas in a poem, it is better that they should be apprehended through concrete and sensuously realized imagery.' *

(1) INTRODUCTION

Part I of this thesis was an attempt to gain some insight into Walter de la Mare's beliefs through a study of his writings. This was necessary because of the lack of a definitive published biography, and the absence of autobiography, memoirs, diaries, collected letters and other material which might have been expected to be available to the public in the case of a well-known man of letters such as de la Mare. His attitudes to the riddle of life and death, and the concomitant importance, in his work on these themes, of the symbols of the Traveller and his Journey, the Goal (or Home), and the Face (or Ideal), have already been commented upon. But now, in Part II, his imagery will be examined in more detail, with special reference to these great Romantic images.¹

William Walsh has stated that in studying a poet one must look not only at individual poems but at them all; for they are 'bound together by their sources, their direction, their continuity and their purposes', and the poet's whole work 'is a clue to the allegory of a man's life'.² De la Mare himself believed that a writer's choice of words betrays his heart;³ and that the objects or images a writer uses are important in revealing his mind. 'Every writer, by the mere mention of any object, and whether he intend it or not, reveals in his context the value he sets on it — the value imposed on it by his

own vision and imagination, or the lack of them, of which he cannot be fully aware'.⁴

However, de la Mare also said that a writer's secret thoughts and emotions are not necessarily revealed to *all* who read his words. Significantly, he sometimes used the phrase 'secret sharer' to suggest that there must be a rapport, a shared identity of feeling, to enable a writer to communicate successfully with his readers. The writer is really talking to himself — an inward self — and 'it is only to a similar inward self, to a secret sharer in others' that what he writes 'has any hope of going home'.⁵ He repeated this image in his foreword to *Art and Scientific Thought*, where he agreed with the author, Martin Johnson, that there is an affinity between the artist and the man of science: they both 'may be said to "create" the form of what they believe in. Their "secret sharers" must have faith in what they themselves create out of the created, through insight and divination' (p.2).

But for the artist who is a poet there is a special difficulty in sharing and communicating his secrets — those fleeting thoughts and emotions which are so intractable when he tries to translate them into words. His difficulty lies in the fact that poetry, and especially lyric poetry, is an extremely compact art form in which the creator has little room for manoeuvre and, ideally, his thoughts must be presented very concisely. This is usually only achieved, if there is any subtlety of thought at all, by the use of imagery. A. C. Partridge says that figurative language is indispensable to poetry. 'Though the content of poetry is words, what it communicates is not merely their literal sense. Poetry is inherent in the *manner* of the

saying, the associations of words raised by sounds and rhythmical relationships, and in the transience or permanence of the images they evoke'.⁶ Some may say that a great poet is unusually sensitive, but this may not necessarily be so. It may be only that he is an expert in language and arranges his words and images so evocatively that he can communicate his experiences better than most to a responsive reader. Although de la Mare wrote that 'all true poetry . . . springs from, and for its communication is dependent on, a rare intuition of the mind and spirit', he also said: 'The ability to communicate our simplest thoughts and feelings by means of language is acquired only after an infinitude of patience and practice expended from our earliest childhood, and . . . the utmost care and pains are needed to convey them adequately and well'.⁷

In writing here about imagery, I am using the term in its more traditional sense rather than the wide and shifting application of the New Criticism.⁸ I mean it to cover simile, metaphor, symbol and allied figurative language where the thoughts of the poet, so often abstract and difficult to explain, are expressed in concrete, sensuous terms, using the actual known world to clarify his ideas and his deeper experiences to his readers. But I do not want to narrow the definition of imagery too much. Perhaps R. A. Foakes's exposition is one of the most useful in this context:

An image is a relationship, though not necessarily an analogy, explicit or implied, between two or more terms, made so that one term or set of terms (the tenor or object-matter) is given an emotional colouring, and its imaginative meaning, though not often its literal sense, is intensified, directed, perhaps to some extent recreated, through its association or identification with the other term or terms (the vehicle or subject-matter) . . . it is not a definition of metaphor and simile alone. It would include allegory, personification, symbolic description and narrative like that of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which seems to be a kind of sustained subject-matter. 9

In his chapter on 'Poetic Imagery', Foakes goes on to remark that one can draw a valid distinction between the types of imagery used by the Romantics on the one hand, and the Metaphysicals and Modernists on the other. For the latter, the power of the metaphors lies in the novelty of the relationships established, and he calls this the 'image of thought'. But, for the Romantics, the sensuous type of imagery, the 'image of impression' was more important. He thinks this 'image of impression' is the natural mode of long poems and lyric poetry, whereas the 'image of thought' is used more for the poetry of conflict, tension and the intellectual poetry typical of the Metaphysicals and the Modernists. But we should not denigrate the romantic, sensuous poetry because it is not particularly in tune with the twentieth century fashion for academic, intellectual poetry, nor should we fall into the habit of labelling the imaginative poetry of the Romantics, which can give so much enjoyment, 'escapist', a word which has often been used repetitively and unthinkingly about poets like de la Mare.¹⁰ As John Masefield wrote: 'By frequent and foolish repetition by the frequently foolish, it has come to pass that it is now a commonplace of criticism that the attempt to give mental enjoyment by imaginative effort ranks a writer as what is called "an escapist"'.¹¹

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(2) THE ROMANTIC NATURE OF DE LA MARE'S IMAGERY

Such criticism of the romantic, predominantly sensuous type of imagery is perhaps one of the root causes of the present-day neglect of de la Mare's poetry. For it is evident from a study of his work that his imagery *is* basically romantic and that he himself was well

aware of this and of his own Romantic heritage and romantic turn of mind. I use the term romantic here in two senses. Firstly, in its narrow, historical sense as denoting the literary Romantic school of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and their predecessors and successors during the nineteenth century, which emphasised the vital role of Nature, the individual, and the imagination in poetry. And secondly, in its wider sense, as describing the romantic attitude of mind and a temperament which agrees with this school in seeing the imagination as of paramount importance, and the inner experience of the unique self as the genuine reality. De la Mare expressed this idea when he wrote: 'Now that it seems . . . that there is an awakening to the life, the reality of the imagination and of the spirit, it is *all* important that those who write poetry should be true to their inmost selves'.¹² The poet (like de la Mare), romantic in this latter sense, expresses a questioning wonder at the beauty of the world, is usually preoccupied with death, is aware of another world of some kind beyond this one, and is an idealist, filled with nostalgia and unfulfilled longing for something unattainable and unknown (or at least inexpressible) in this life. For what is a poem, de la Mare asks, 'but the expression of something which has been intensely felt and delighted in, sensuous or imaginative, of the body, the mind or the spirit. It tells of a supremely vivifying discovery, of a secret suddenly made plain, a longing satisfied, a dream fulfilled'.¹³

Had de la Mare been born earlier he might have found an important place in the Romantic school. As it was, although he was recognized as a considerable poet in his earlier years, later on he came to be called the 'last great Romantic' at a time when romanticism, at least in intellectual circles, was a dirty word. He began to write when the

Romantic revival had decayed and romantic poetry had, on the whole, strayed from real life (as with the Decadents and some of the poetry of the nineties), and Wordsworth's and Coleridge's 'language of men'. Yet, with Hardy, de la Mare kept the true romantic line alive — that line which, by-passing the Modernist poetry of T. S. Eliot and his school, has continued through Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Edwin Muir, Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis and others to this day. For he moved on from his early, sometimes rather immature and extravagant romanticism, with its decorative whimsicality, its bric-à-brac of fairies, witches, dwarves, giants and gnomes, and its literary-type images of moon, ravens, yews and cypresses. He pruned his out-of-date poetic diction, developing in his later poetry a more dignified and considered use of the best of the great Romantic traditions in form, theme, image and diction. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Edward Thomas, after reading *The Listeners*, put his finger on de la Mare's early self-conscious romanticism developed, like that of the young Yeats, from the nineteenth century Romantics and other vague pre-Raphaelite and nineties influences:

In fact I believe you are the only one within your world. Does that sound a very harsh saying? I didn't mean it so. I mean that somehow you have gone and enchanted yourself into a castle 'named only Alas!' which is a beautiful castle for me to contemplate this May in Wiltshire but a curst one to inhabit, I feel certain. 14

It is obvious from an article that de la Mare wrote that he was aware of the danger that excessive use of romantic tools could militate against good poetry: 'Essential poetry appeals not to the many but to the few. As the scale of excellence descends — when sentiment sweetens into sentimentality, pathos melts into tearfulness, romance thins into romanticism, pure thought becomes vague and diffuse — the audience increases'. In the same article he said that he was

against art which 'immune from external shock . . . tends towards a too exhaustive culture. It shuts its doors against a dull and noisy world, and its followers are in danger of being stifled in the fume of their own incense'.¹⁵ But, on the other hand, to be part of a tradition is not to be unoriginal, and de la Mare did not want to give up those romantic tools altogether, for he believed that the romantic element appears in all great poetry.¹⁶ He praised the ballads and the true old poetry of the people, 'coarse, vigorous, gaudy and endurable', which he felt were romantic in the best sense. He wanted to build a bridge (as Yeats had also wanted) between 'the exquisite and the homely', so that the grown-up could enjoy *his* nursery rhymes.¹⁷

De la Mare has something in common with Baudelaire, in that he stood for tradition and yet also sometimes for experiment. As with all good poets, he is unique even though he appears to be derivative and old-fashioned in form. Like Baudelaire, he wanted to penetrate material reality to reach something beyond it; and he was also haunted by the image of the world as a prison, by death and dream and the sense of exile, by time and the clock.¹⁸ Baudelaire defined Romanticism as 'a manner of feeling'; and de la Mare echoed this, calling the romantic 'an enrichment, a radiance'. 'It is descriptive of a state of mind, since in nature and in life there is nothing romantic unless thinking or feeling makes it so. Objects *per se* know it not; it is an aspect conferred on them by the watcher behind the eye'.¹⁹

But, like Baudelaire, de la Mare's romantic attitude to life was tempered by a strong apprehension of ordinary, everyday things. This can be seen particularly in the often unsentimental, detailed and hardy realism (or what he called 'realization') of his poetry for

children.²⁰ Like Baudelaire he mingled archaic words deliberately with modern colloquialisms, believing that a poet should have as many alternative words to choose from as possible, and that he should be able to make use of the whole gamut of language.²¹ His ideas are timeless, yet belong to his century. Indeed, Owen Barfield stresses that he did not fit into 'the mood of unashamedly derivative romanticism, which is taken . . . as the leading characteristic of Georgian poetry'.²² And in the face of much criticism that his poetry has nothing to do with real life, two anonymous reviewers wrote respectively:

His view is no circumscribed one and he is acutely sensitive to the condition of man in this century and out of it.

The truth is that, from an intensely personal idiom that ostensibly carries a rejection of the modern world, the modern mind can receive valid consolation and enlargement.²³

There is no doubt however that, fundamentally, de la Mare's temperament and attitude to life were romantic. In a BBC broadcast he showed himself against an 'insect-existence' and anything which destroys peace and solitude, and 'for eccentricity, the original and the unique' — all essentially romantic ideas. He wanted children to have more time to daydream and be themselves, and 'the half-hidden, half-secret resources of man's mind and spirit' to be 'given a wider attention and outlet'.²⁴ In his work too, in form, theme, setting and diction, he revealed his romantic attitudes. They can be seen very clearly in the lush romanticism of the early novel *Henry Brocken* (1904), with its traveller on horseback journeying into the realm of romantic literature. And still, in 1945, *The Traveller* is richly romantic with its lonely horseman in a sombre romantic landscape and its dream within a dream (in *The Ancient Mariner* tradition), though it has much less of

the purple patch and youthful affectation of *Henry Brocken*. Even in his last long poem *Winged Chariot* (1951), the modern images of the Yale key, the telephone, machines and atoms and stocks and shares, for example, are only minor elements in this basically romantic meditation on Time. The Romantic tradition can also be clearly seen in de la Mare's use of such favourite Romantic images as the quest, the ideal, the island, the centre, the light and the water. Besides these archetypal Romantic symbols, he employed Foakes's romantic 'images of impression', with their natural and traditional connections. Foakes says of these:

Flowers, the sun, the sea, stars, and so forth . . . may be used again and again in the same way without losing their freshness, for their appeal is permanent, being continually renewed as a fresh experience in every generation. They tend to gather richer associations with repeated use, and come to embody a complex of relationships which do not need to be stated in the poem. 25

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(3) THE SYMBOLIST POET: HIS USE OF 'NATURAL' AND 'LITERARY' IMAGES

De la Mare is, to some extent, a Symbolist writer, and richly associative images such as Foakes describes may become symbolical.²⁶ Edmund Wilson, describing the assumptions underlying Symbolism, says that 'it is the poet's task to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols'.²⁷ His words are echoed by de la Mare:

Poetry has a language of its own . . . Feelings as well as thoughts may be expressed in symbols — and every 'character' in a story is not only a 'chink', a peep-hole in the dark cottage from which his maker looks out upon the world, but is also in some degree representative of himself, if a self in disguise. 28

Like Coleridge, de la Mare seemed to feel that there is an obscure symbolism in natural objects and, like Baudelaire, that man lives in a forest of symbols.²⁹ In *Behold This Dreamer*, he wrote that 'there is scarcely an object around us that cannot be conceived of as a symbol figurative of anything with which the waking mind is deeply concerned' (p.82); and later: 'The hollow tap-tap of the blind tassel *may* bring the ominous drumming of Destiny to mind; the motor horn, the dizzy "progress" of civilisation' (p.69). As Perkins suggests, he must have believed too that 'the poetic imagination is in touch with realities deeper than reason or consciousness and that these realities are presented or evoked in symbols', which can be drawn from our outer material world.³⁰ Richard Church described this attitude well when he wrote that de la Mare saw the world of nature, man and God 'as a sort of cryptic writing, a code message condensing the realities of a more remote, and infinitely more vast and august, as well as more terrible universe which lies behind the quicksilver of the mirror, within the candle-flame'.³¹ It is this side of de la Mare which has often been neglected by the critics, although many have noted the strangeness and even terror which lie behind much of what seems at first glance innocent and simple in his work. De la Mare himself said several times that 'an idiosyncratic touch of strangeness' is essential to poetry and is 'never absent from any really original work'. But he believed that although such things as strange dreams may to some extent be told or described, this can only be done in 'the terms and imagery of our waking life'.³²

De la Mare indeed frequently used the ordinary, everyday world as a source for the images and symbols which he required to illuminate those deeper things he experienced in his mind and heart, and this

perhaps explains the duality of his poetic approach. On the one hand, his images are concrete 'natural' images from nature (for example, bird, flower, insect, sun, moon and star), or from the world of man (for example, house, garden, the railway, the road, the cage and the mirror). While, on the other hand, he draws more fanciful 'literary' images from the world of books, myth and archetype, literature and romance, or from his 'other world' of dream and imagination. In *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination* he emphasised this possible duality in a poet. Taking his cue from Dr Johnson's phrase that 'the lad does not care for the child's rattle', he worked out his theory that there are two types of imagination and two types of imagery — the visionary, predominantly that of the child-mind, and the intellectual, that of the lad. The poet with a predominantly intellectual imagination, with an analytical, logical mind — the poet with more of the lad in him — the 'restless, curious, untiring inquirer' with the largely objective consciousness, uses words which 'are not symbols; they mean precisely what they say and only what they say. Whereas the words of the mystics of the child-like imagination, Blake and Vaughan and Coleridge, seem chiefly to mean what is left hinted at, rather than expressed'. These poets have an intuitive and visionary imagination. The poet, like Rupert Brooke, of intellectual imagination, 'is impatient of a vague idealism, as wary as a fox of the faintest sniff of sentimentality', and is 'all activity'. The visionary poets, on the other hand, 'live in the quietude of their imaginations, in a far-away listening, and are most happy when at peace, if not passive'. 33

This distinction between two types of poet and two types of imagery can be related to de la Mare himself. Indeed, in *Art and Scientific Thought* he cited Leonardo da Vinci as an example of 'the happy marriage in a true mind between knowledge and that poetic experience which is the wellspring of all the arts', which was once unquestioned. There are two kinds of truth, he continued, 'the validity of fact and an innate conviction of the truth of the imagination'.³⁴ Martin Johnson himself seems to have understood this duality in de la Mare for, writing about his poetry, he said that 'the imaginary, the symbolic, or the fantastic, may be vehicles of realist communication from poet to reader not inferior to those arts which confine themselves to the mundane or material'.³⁵

When this scientific, intellectual, analytical side predominates in de la Mare's poetry, his images tend to be 'natural', straightforward, clear and uncomplicated, and we have the poet of acute observation, the poet of the material world. Then he writes humorous and often quite earthy poems, such as many of his poems for children and the descriptive poems about flowers, birds and animals. It is then that the bookworm tires of his books:

'Something has gone, and ink and print
Will never bring it back;
I long for the green fields again,
I'm tired of books,' said Jack. (CP149—50) ³⁶

A good example of this down-to-earth type of poem is 'Miss T.'

It's a very odd thing —
As odd as can be —
That whatever Miss T. eats
Turns into Miss T.;
Porridge and apples,
Mince, muffins and mutton,
Jam, junket, jumbles —
Not a rap, not a button
It matters; the moment

They're out of her plate,
Though shared by Miss Butcher
And sour Mr. Bate;
Tiny and cheerful,
And neat as can be,
Whatever Miss T. eats
Turns into Miss T.

(CP146)

On the other hand, when de la Mare writes in his visionary vein, the symbols he uses are frequently literary and romantic — images of that other world of imagination, the lost, enchanted Paradise which the child knows and which the adult loses sight of as he moves further away from his childhood. In his Introduction to *The Small Years*, he quoted from and agreed with the author that 'only the child can see the two worlds side by side and seriously live at once by two standards'.³⁷ For de la Mare, childhood was a time when the two types of imagination are not divided, and he thought that, in a way, every poet is at heart a child.³⁸ His 'visionary' poetry is thus full of two-self and two-world images, as in *The Traveller*:

So flows experience: the vast Without;
Its microcosm, of the Soul, within;
Whereof the day-distracted eye may doubt,³⁹
But doubts no more as soon as dreams begin.

(CP502, iv)

In *Behold This Dreamer*, in a section entitled 'Other Worlds', he quoted Marvell's line from 'The Garden', 'Far other Worlds, and other Seas' (p.49). This 'other world' for de la Mare was not unreal — just out of reach. As visionary, he sought to find the 'real' life behind what he called 'actuality' — the seeming real. Like Jung he thought that there is a deep need in man, a finite creature, for relation with the infinite and the eternal which may possibly impinge on that other world. In his poem 'Books', he wrote:

Imagination, on its earth-bound quest,
Seeks in the infinite its finite rest;

(CP775—77, iv)

So, to illustrate his Platonic idea that there are more planes in life than just those of the five senses, reason and logic — that, in fact, the world is a shadow of a larger reality — de la Mare used, it seems, romantic, literary and mythic images and symbols, things hinted at rather than expressed, as well as those from nature and material life.

To him, as to the modern critic, imagery was of central importance in poetry. He made this clear in his review of J. G. Jennings's *Metaphor in Poetry*, where he agreed with the author that 'metaphor is the creative factor in language' and imaginative minds 'pine in its absence'. It is, he went on,

a rich imaginative exercise of the whole poetic mind in contemplation of that complexity in unity which is alike the delight, the wonder, and the mystery of all human experience in the world. All things bear an intrinsic resemblance to one another since all are compounded of the same elements; and metaphor is the revelation of such resemblances . . . A poem is therefore not only charged with metaphor, it is itself a metaphor . 40

But the symbols de la Mare used and the way he used them have been much criticised. For example, David Cecil thought he employed too much imagery and that he overworked such romantic symbols as the rose, the moon, twilight and dream.⁴¹ Douglas Garman said that his imagery is seldom from direct sensuous experience, but taken from books or 'a storehouse of wishy-washy dreaming' — a rather sweeping view seen in the light of de la Mare's capacity for acute observation of natural objects.⁴² Perkins however thought that, particularly later on, de la Mare used these 'overworked' romantic, literary symbols and images consciously and exploited the conventions for the associations they raised in the reader's mind; that he used 'stock responses' as a resource of poetry.⁴³ Graham Greene also thought that he played consciously with clichés, showing other

meanings hidden in them.⁴⁴ It is certainly difficult to believe that, except when he was a youthful apprentice poet where such a weakness is certainly apparent, a poet and craftsman as accomplished as de la Mare would not guard against the feeble use of cliché, overworked symbol and vague imagery.

It is interesting to note that de la Mare was perfectly conscious of the origins of cliché and overworked metaphor: 'Under the microscope of the etymologist the most dessicated terms of intellectual speech reveal their sensuous and metaphorical origin', he wrote. He showed, too, that he appreciated the difference between an over-conscious artifice in image, which all but obliterates that which it should reveal, and the 'fusion' of which Coleridge speaks, as being necessary for an image to succeed. For, he said, 'in the purest poetry the image is lost in the thing in itself'.⁴⁵ He also showed himself well aware of the dangers of cliché and of the necessity for reminting staled language and perished metaphors;⁴⁶ even referring to the moon (for overuse of which he has so frequently been criticised), as 'that old way-worn, verse-worn queen of fantasy'.⁴⁷

He commented, however, in this same article, that 'there is little strikingly "new" for any poet to say', though, as he had remarked earlier in 'Georgian Poetry', 'every age necessarily needs and seeks its own poetry'. He continued:

But true poetry is never the peculiar possession of any particular race or period. It varies superficially and in differing environments, it flags, and is renewed; but in essentials it does not change. As each new poet, then, responds to one of the rarest and deepest of all impulses, he is bound to follow and at the same time slightly to stray from the one clear tradition.⁴⁸

Tradition was important to de la Mare. He had studied psychology and the work of Jung particularly, and he believed that the special

emotional significance of poetry is due to the stirring in the reader's mind, beneath his conscious response, of unconscious forces, which Jung called 'psychic residua', of numberless experiences of the same type. In *Behold This Dreamer* he wrote that 'every creative work of the imagination had its seed in the "Unconscious" . . . its flowers and fruit . . . owed their origin to a graft of the waking mind on the wild and ancient stock of dream ' (p.102). De la Mare believed that dream is important in poetry and that archetypal symbols may arise from dream and the unconscious. Many of his central symbols and images, therefore, are from the great myths and archetypes reproduced in literature, which he deployed from his astonishingly wide reading and from the myths, legends, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and the Bible reading of his boyhood.

I use the term archetype here in the sense of persistent themes and images which occur frequently in literature, myth, religion or folk-lore and awaken a strong, but perhaps illogical response from the so-called unconscious or racial memory.⁴⁹ De la Mare, writing of a visionary world of reverie, 'a kind of clairvoyance' in some imaginative English poetry, said: 'Whence these shapes and visions come, from what past; through what channels of heredity; or by what influence or agency; what they signify; and what bearing they may have on a future life are questions as yet probably beyond human answer'.⁵⁰ He probably felt with Maud Bodkin that the mind that reads responds because of its own emotions roused by familiar evocative symbols; old images from long ago in the memory interrelate with the reading of another poem and cause an emotional reaction, a 'cry of the blood'.⁵¹

This is perhaps the reason why de la Mare made use of the stock responses and romantic images which Perkins refers to. Perkins's use

of the phrase 'stock responses' in his discussion of de la Mare makes it clear that de la Mare's employment of archetypal symbols is fairly straightforward and unsophisticated (and not always, indeed, consistent). There is no need to go symbol hunting in his work or to delve over deeply into what Larkin called 'the myth kitty', as will be seen when these images are examined later in more detail. The mythic images he used, with their universal-suggestive meanings, for example the Quest, the Traveller, the Journey of Life and the Spirit in the Cage of life, express in a specific and concrete form some deep and primitive feeling in man about life. They are central, archetypal symbols in literature, as they are in de la Mare's work.

In spite of the fact that de la Mare's writings are very diverse in type, showing not only the fey element for which he is well-known, but also his capacity for exact observation of the everyday things of life, there is a unity, a recurrence, or at least a linkage of strongly individual, characteristic themes, images and symbols. These images are drawn, as I have shown, both from his very wide reading and from the material world of Nature and Man. The first I have called the 'literary image'; the second, the 'natural image'. A study of both these types of image, therefore (and, through them, a study of his inner imaginative life), should be very helpful in elucidating de la Mare's work, which so often appears simple and yet can be complex and ambiguous.

The difficulty in isolating the meaning of many of his poems and stories can be seen when we note how often critics have taken diametrically opposite views on their interpretations. Two well-known examples may be cited here — the poem 'The Listeners' (CP126), and the short story 'The Riddle'. As for 'The Listeners':

The difficulty lies not in finding allegorical meanings for the Traveler and the listeners, but in finding too many such meanings. Readers have seen the Traveler as God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, a ghost, Man, a man, or Walter de la Mare; the listeners have been made to stand for the powers of darkness, the riddle of life, the dead, a living household, Man, or de la Mare's schoolmates. 52

The house in 'The Listeners' some say is this world; while others say it is the other world. 53 In 'The Riddle', the old oak chest, for John Atkins, is the world, while for Luce Bonnerot it is death. 54 And, to take a less well-known example. While, perhaps, to the ordinary but imaginative reader, the poem 'Maerchen' (CP251) appears to be simply an imaginative picture of the old Sleeping Beauty theme, to Elisabeth Schneider it suggests that the palace is the decaying world, man is the cat and the King is the dying God; even that the poem depicts social revolution, with Authority expiring and the people about to take over. 55

De la Mare says many times that readers can make their own interpretations of his poems — indeed they should. Mr Richard de la Mare, when asked if his father ever spoke much about the meanings of his poems, replied:

No. But he used to read out his poems to us and to friends, and he would listen to criticism from people like Forrest Reid, but he did not discuss interpretations or technique. He was always being asked about the meaning of 'The Listeners', and so he made up a particular explanation, but I think he was amused at the necessity for it . . . the poems are capable of different interpretations; every reader should take his own. But my father never discussed the poems like that, as far as I can remember. 56

This opinion is confirmed by a letter (7 February 1944) to Miss Sime:

As to 'The Listeners' — I have frequently been asked to expound its meaning and in reply have usually suggested that the very kind enquirer should keep to any meaning he may himself have been able to find in it . . . moreover (quite between ourselves, of course!), I am now a little vague concerning what was the intended meaning of those particular lines. Its rudiments, I think, were that the Traveller is a reincarnation revisiting this world beneath the glimpses of the moon, and there asking the same old unanswerable questions of The Listeners — only conceived but never embodied — who for ever frequent,

it would seem, this earthly existence. But then are even these rudiments divivable — from the poem? Every poem, of course, to its last syllable is its meaning, to attempt any paraphrase of the poem is in some degree to change that meaning and its effect on the imagination, — and often disastrously. 57

All the same, even if the real or intended meanings of some of the poems is unclear, a study of de la Mare's imagery, the things and objects to which he refers both in his poetry and his prose, may be, as I have suggested, of great importance in achieving a maximum understanding of the poet. In 'A Poet of Two Worlds: The Imagery of Mr. de la Mare', the reviewer (quoting T. S. Eliot) wrote that the critic who is 'tormented by the restless desire to penetrate to the heart and marrow of a poet' should turn to his imagery, for he gives himself away in it; and de la Mare's poetry and prose, with its 'abundant and characteristic' images 'offers a hopeful field for this kind of inquiry'. 58

In order to organise such a study of de la Mare's imagery, it may be helpful to make use of Winifred Nowotny's distinction between two kinds of symbolism. The poet, she says, may use familiar images which have gathered rich associations with repeated use in literature, and have therefore come to have a built-in, generally agreed symbolism. As examples of this 'familiar image', she cites the rose and the lamb. Or he may use a perfectly ordinary object ('an object of moral neutrality'), which is obviously very important to *him* and evidently does not have a simple meaning, but is 'set in a succession of contexts that . . . promote it into a symbol'. As an example of this type of symbol, she quotes the use of dress in *King Lear*. 59

Under the heading of the 'familiar image', with built-in, agreed symbolism (which I include in the term 'literary image'), can be placed the traditional poetic imagery used to such a large extent by

de la Mare. These are the clusters of universal, archetypal and characteristically Romantic symbols, already mentioned, such as the quest, the journey and the traveller. Linked with these is a group of other-world images with a Biblical flavour, such as Eden and Paradise, the Fall, exile and the innocent child. There are also some older, sixteenth-century and medieval images like the sphere, the centre, the waters of life, light and its contrasting darkness. Included here would be de la Mare's bookish images from nature — what Bernard Blackstone calls 'simple stereotypes'.⁶⁰ These are the conventionalised symbols such as the willow, the owl and the asphodel. Though they are images from nature, they have an artificial, poetical flavour, and have accumulated literary overtones. A typical example of a de la Mare lyric using this type of imagery is 'The Disguise', with its Elizabethan, pre-Raphaelite and Decadent echoes:

Thou with thy cheek on mine,
And dark hair loosed, shalt see
Take the far stars for fruit
The cypress tree,
And in the yew's black
Shall the moon be.

(CP203—04,iii)

The images de la Mare used from the everyday world of man can also often be poetically artificial. His houses, for example, are sometimes conventionalised into fairy-tale palaces, romantic chateaux, ivory towers and lonely, turreted castles.⁶¹ These too may be called his 'literary' images.

Under the second heading, that is the ordinary object with acquired, personal symbolism (or what I have called the 'natural' image), can be placed the images which de la Mare used from the real rather than the bookish world: for example, flowers, birds and animals drawn

from his observation of the world of nature. De la Mare was a keen observer of the life of nature, although not a nature poet indulging in meticulous catalogues like, for example, John Clare. He loved the countryside and deplored what he called the uglification of England — the loss of hedges, wild roses and English trees.⁶² He was thus not only a poet who lived deeply in his own imagination, but also 'extraordinarily rational'. He was 'a practical mystic'.⁶³ He believed that the poet should combine imagination and practicality and that he should ponder on ordinary things like 'the exquisite green-bronze iridescence of a starling's plumage', and the 'colours of an apple before we peel it'.⁶⁴ He said that 'all true poetry is the outcome of observation', and that although people say that it is decorative and unreal and that we must get down to facts, 'poetry *is* those facts', and 'we must do our very utmost to stick close to essentials'.⁶⁵ Such 'natural' images may be used by de la Mare in a perfectly straightforward way, as in his simple poems about nature's plants and creatures, which are well-observed and symbol-free. Or, they may have a particular symbolic importance for him (for example, the bird).⁶⁶ Under this heading should be included also the quite ordinary images from the world of man which he used. For instance, he invested the house, with its doors, windows, staircases and gardens, and other everyday objects (for example, the mirror, the candle, the face and the railway), with a peculiar significance individual to himself.

De la Mare recognised, in general, the different types of image outlined above, for he quoted Lord Dunsany as saying that pure poetry is of two kinds: 'that which mirrors the world in which our bodies are, and that which builds the more mysterious kingdom where geography

ends and fairyland begins'.⁶⁷ He went on:

All roses are admirable; Waller's 'rose', even if it was but 'the ghost of a rose,' is unique. Thus, while the poetry of the one order makes its actuality mysterious, the poetry of the other order makes its 'mysterious' actual. Both are of the imagination, both are forms of art. 68

However, for the purpose of image-analysis in de la Mare's work, an explicit division between the 'literary' image and the 'natural' image cannot satisfactorily be drawn, for poetic imagination does not always follow a clearly-defined track. Images and ideas intertwine, cross and criss-cross and are linked (as so often in any writer's work) throughout de la Mare's prose and poetry. They reappear in different contexts with different connotations, and often with layers of accreted meaning, forming a kind of shorthand which the reader has to decipher with the aid of his own imagination. As Helen Gardner points out, one of the prime tasks of the critic is to lay bare the inner principle of a writer's works not only by a close analysis of the language, but particularly by 'a study of the images considered as symbols whose recurrent use creates patterns of meaning, through which we apprehend the real content of the work or the prime and dominant concern of the writer'.⁶⁹

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(4) THE HOLISTIC PATTERN OF HIS IMAGERY: HIS HANDLING OF THE IMAGE OF THE HOUSE

The study of this overall or recurrent pattern of symbolism in de la Mare's work is especially important because he does not use many elaborate single metaphors; neither does he, as do so many intellectual modern poets, make use of free association, often untranslatable symbols and abrupt juxtapositions in the manner of a

poet like Donne. In fact, he is much more inclined to use the simple simile rather than the complex metaphor. So the meaning and flavour of his poetry at its deeper level tends to come over in an holistic way. But, however ordinary the objects he seizes upon to translate into symbols or patterns of symbols, like any other important poet his imagination is so potent that they are usually successful in helping him to convey, often quite simply, a particular fact and his own personal attitude to that fact.

To illustrate this interconnection and overlapping between the 'literary' and 'natural' image in de la Mare's work — this holism — and also as an example of the use of 'a perfectly ordinary object' being used symbolically and recurrently in different contexts, I shall take one of de la Mare's favourite images — that of the house.

(a) The Symbolic Ramifications of the 'House'

De la Mare himself commented on the many different senses, the 'overtones' that the word 'home' may have, in his *Stories from the Bible*:

Even the most usual of words in the most ordinary of circumstances may have many senses. We say, 'Here I am, at home': meaning, 'in my own familiar place'; and, maybe, 'the house where I was born'. But as when striking a note softly on a piece of fine glass one may listen on to the echoes of the word home in memory, they can hardly fail to remind us of the home that is the body, where the 'I, myself', has its earthly dwelling. Next, maybe, of the 'keeping in order' of that home. And last, of the home of the heart's desire, which has had almost as many names given to it as there are races of mankind. (pp.xii-xiii)

This explicit statement of the possible symbolic ramifications of a particular word refutes, I suggest, J. M. Purcell's criticism that 'the symbolism in de la Mare's poetry always causes difficulty and results largely in subjective interpretations . . . because of the vague way in which de la Mare uses symbols. It may be that he himself did not think clearly in verse'.⁷⁰ For it seems, as with so much of de la Mare's mature technique, at least, that what appears to be simplistic

in him is often deliberate policy, and that each word he used was carefully considered. 'De la Mare never uses meaningless descriptive words', says Elisabeth Schneider. ⁷¹

It is worth noting here, once more, that de la Mare was perfectly well aware of the criticism that might be (and was) levelled at him for what he himself called in *Behold This Dreamer* the 'trite and incorrigibly romantic' use of symbols such as the moon (p.21). For, in *Desert Islands*, he again showed himself practical enough to realize that the image of the lonely, deserted, phantom-ridden house, which he so often used, is a heavily romantic one: 'Assuredly if the deserted house ever follows the "solitary horseman" into the oblivion of the old-fashioned, fiction will have been deprived of one more of its hoarily romantic objects' (p.240). Yet he still used it defiantly for his own poetic purposes — and successfully too, as is shown by the popularity of 'The Listeners', where there is a deserted house, a solitary horseman, and a moon to boot.

Except when its symbolic meaning is of peace, comfort and home, de la Mare's 'house' is usually romantically mysterious and deserted, often reached by a lonely track, often surrounded by a neglected, tree-shadowed garden. Like the boy in his short story 'The Princess', he loved old houses, and particularly houses that appeared to be haunted, and he seems to have been fascinated by solitary, abandoned houses. ⁷² His preoccupation with this image is underlined by the fact that at least twice he quoted Longfellow's phrase: 'All houses wherein man has lived and died, are haunted houses'. ⁷³

Very often these houses of his are large, comfortable Victorian houses, but they are not the places of security they appear to be. They are often peopled by ghosts and bodiless voices, and in them

there may be dark, phantom-haunted corridors lighted by dim tapers,
as in his early, simple, ballad-type poem 'The Phantom':

Late the hour; dark the night;
The house is solitary;
Feeble is a taper's light
To light poor Ann to see. . . .

Around her loom the vacant rooms,
Wind the upward stairs,
She climbs on into a loneliness
Only her taper shares. . . .

O! in an old unfriendly house,
What shapes may not conceal
Their faces in the open day,
At night abroad to steal!

It is only a lonely, blue-eyed, phantom child that Ann meets in the
dark corridor — a friendly little ghost — but there are others not
so friendly:

Ghosts in the world, malignant, grim,
Vex many a wood and glen,
And house and pool, — the unquiet ghosts
Of dead and restless men.

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(CP33—35, iii,vii,xii,xxii)

Some of these lonely houses have blank windows, or perhaps a shadowy
face can be glimpsed, as in 'The Vacant Farmhouse':

That attic casement. . . . Was there flaw in the glass? ...
I thought, as I glanced up, there had peered a face.
(CP540—41, iii)

Compare with this a passage from one of his reviews:

Even the depressed wayfarer along some stagnant suburban street may
occasionally lift his eyes to windows mute with a message of warning
and foreboding. An imaginative mind, by a kind of instinct, divines
the legend written on such walls and can people the rooms beyond such
windows with just that peculiar kind of human beings whose tragic
doings in life they have as it were secreted. 75

The mysterious, lonely house appears very often in de la Mare's
work, as often (or even more often) in the short stories as in the
poems. Many of his stories (and particularly the ghost stories of

course) have as their settings a secluded house with its garden and trees. There is, for example, the haunted sea house in 'Music', filled with 'a vast, strangely beautiful and terrifying strain of harmony'; the house at the end of the old railway in 'The Lost Track', with its 'deserted, almost forlorn appearance', where the long-hidden diamond burned 'with its own imprisoned radiance'; the house, 'straggling and gabled', resting in a green gap in a ravine where lived the crazed Mr Kempe; and Montrésor, with its speaking windows, its unweeded drive and towering chestnut, home of the uncanny Mr Bloom. ⁷⁶

In the poems, the most famous of these houses is that in 'The Listeners': the lone, turreted house with its moonlit door, its leaf-fringed sill, its dark stair and empty hall thronged with phantom listeners. But there are many other companion pieces in *The Complete Poems*. There are houses standing amid darkness, in deep forests, in desolate gardens, for example: 'The Empty House' 'beneath its vast-boughed trees'; the house of Stare by 'the dark pool icy still'; the haunted house with its 'garden of thistledown and tares'. There are abandoned, derelict houses with 'paint scaling' and 'hingeless door'; with 'rusty gate' and 'grass-grown path'. And there are lonely houses by the sea:

The house by the sand dunes
Was bleached and dark and bare;

and The house is of stone; there are twelve lattice windows,
 And a door, with a keyhole — though lost is the key.

There is, too, a house on a lonely moor with a crazily swinging, ramshackle gate, where 'no face shows at the window-glass', 'No smoke wreathes up in the empty air', and 'no thumb tirls at the broken latch'. ⁷⁷

Not only is the house, with its windows, doors, corridors and stairs, a dominant image in de la Mare's poems and stories, but it appears in his other prose works and reviews. There is a good example of this in the extended metaphor he used in his review of Ruskin's Works:

A man takes up his candle, and in its clear but baffling light must push his way through the darkness of life's corridor past every hindrance, stopping his ears as best he can against fear and the conflicting voices, towards the glimmer of the window at the far end, only to stand at last confronting in the dark glass, against the deeper darkness of the night without, his own weary and haunted face . . . ⁷⁸

De la Mare used the house symbolically in at least six different ways in his prose and poetry, and there are other subsidiary meanings which impinge on these main meanings. He used it variously to stand for this life and the world; the human body; the imagination, dream and the subconscious (with particular reference to the door of the house); death; a place of comfort and security; and so, by analogy with home, for our final home, paradise, heaven, and all that that means in archetypal terms.

(b) The House as Symbol for Life and the World

The review extract above (Note 78) shows de la Mare's use of the house as a symbol for this life and the world. Similarly, he wrote elsewhere that 'life is an old house of many rooms', and 'This house of life's to let'. ⁷⁹ A subsidiary use is the idea of the house of life as a prison, as in 'A Young Girl':

Mine a dark fate. Behind his iron bars
The captive broods, with ear and heart a-strain
For jangle of key, for glimpse of moon or stars,
Grey shaft of daylight, sighing of the rain.
Life built these walls. . . .

(c) Symbol for the Body

Vaughan wrote of 'that loose / And empty house / Which I sometimes liv'd in', and Traherne: 'I was within / A House I knew not, newly cloath'd with Skin'.⁸⁰ De la Mare followed them in his use of the house as a symbol for the body, as in 'To a Candle':

'Love made this house wherein there dwells
A thing divine, and homeless else.
Not mine the need to ponder why
In this sweet prison I exult and sigh. . . .'

(CP467—68,vi)

Compare his picture of a sleeping child in *Behold This Dreamer*:

A motionless sleep may suggest to the onlooker the image of death; but hardly if the sleeper is a young child — the lip and cheek bedewed and softly flushed, the limbs in an exquisite abandon and repose. Then it is as if indeed the occupant of this marvellous small house were absent. (p.48)

(d) Symbol for the Mind, Imagination, Sleep and Dream

The prototype for de la Mare's use of the house as an image for the mind and imagination is the house of Thrae — that old stone house in a hollow, with its small dark windows, turret and weather vane, which he described in *Come Hither*. This is a house of fantasy, almost a fairy-tale house or palace, symbol of the world of imagination to which the boy Simon periodically retreated from the ordinary world: 'When I was most busy and happy and engrossed in it, it seemed to be a house which might at any moment vanish before your eyes, showing itself to be but the outer shell or hiding place of an abode still more enchanting' (p.xviii). Writing of Thomas Hardy, de la Mare used the same image: 'Like all preternaturally real people, Mr. Hardy's characters are also a little like ghosts. For they have one and all come out of the house of imagination into which all our fellow-beings must go if we are really to understand them'.⁸¹ And in *Love* he called the mind 'a delectable ivory tower, aloof and secluded' (p.lxxi).

Similarly in his poems his more fantastic buildings — the king of Never-to-be's palace, the Dark Château of his dreams and the Tower of Ivory in 'Time Passes', are all houses of dream and imagination.⁸²

This concept of the house as an image for the mind and imagination is closely allied to its use as a symbol for sleep and dream. The door of the house is an entrance to dream and the subconscious; and the wall is the prison wall of life holding man back from his quest for the living waters and the ideal face. In 'I Met at Eve', the Prince of Sleep has a house:

His house is in the mountain ways,
A phantom house of misty walls; (CP49, iv)

in *Behold This Dreamer* he wrote that 'all day long the door of the sub-conscious remains just ajar; we slip through to the other side, and return again, as easily and secretly as a cat' (p.77); in 'Dreams' he describes how we must escape over life's walls to find the elixir vitae:

Starven with cares, like tares in wheat,
Wildered with knowledge, chilled with doubt,
The timeless self in vain must beat
Against its walls to hasten out
Whither the living waters fount;
And — evil and good no more at strife —
Seek love beneath the tree of life; (CP353, xxxvi)

and in 'Out of a Dream' we must find our way through the door to glimpse the face of the Ideal:

And lo — Earth's close-shut door,
Its panels a cross, its key
Of common and rusting iron,
Opened, and showed to me
A face — found; lost — of old;
Of a lifetime's longing the sum;
And eyes that assuaged all grief:
'Behold! I am come'. (CP495, ii)

An extension of this use of the house image is to be found where de la Mare, in discussing Freud's attitude to sex, employs the concept

of the Beast in the Cellar and the Bird in the Attic as symbols of man's lower, subconscious instincts and his higher ones:

That a Blatant Beast, with virtues of its own nature, is confined in the cellar known as the Unconscious, of which it is advisable as far as possible to keep the key, is undeniable; but there is also a caged bird in the attic, and one of a marvellous song. 83

Incidentally, de la Mare was too much of a Romantic to believe in Freud's positivist ideas, and he disapproved of his views on sex.

The closed door, sometimes just ajar for the adult but, for the child, wide open to the 'beauteous one' in the ideal kingdom of his pre-existence; and the knocking on that door, are favourite de la Mare images. The closed door, like the walls of the house, and the veil (a similar de la Mare image), cuts us off from the knowledge of the mystery of life and death. On that closed door the traveller beats to find the answers to his questions: 'Is there anybody there?' he cries — but 'Nothingness made no reply'. 84

(e) Symbol for Death

As the door or gate may be an entrance to sleep and dream, or to the imagination and the subconscious, so de la Mare also used it as a symbol for the entrance to death; for death, he thought, is like sleep:

As to a hound that mewing waits,
Death opens, and shuts to, his gates. 85

De la Mare is using here (once again) what might be called a hackneyed literary image, for the door and gate to Death, Heaven or Hell is an ancient, much-used image found in both classical and romantic literature and, of course, in the Bible and myth. In Greek mythology, for example, Tartarus with its gates of bronze stood in the underworld — the meeting place of the souls of the dead. In The Revelation, Jesus said: 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock'. Milton wrote: 'Open,

ye everlasting gates . . . / Open, ye heavens, your living doors';
and Blake, 'The Door of Death is made of gold'.⁸⁶ De la Mare drew
heavily on literary sources for his imagery but, as noted before, the
Bible had an especial influence on him, as we know from the many re-
ferences he made to it: 'Remembrance of what the matchless originals
in the Bible itself meant to me when I was a child is still fresh
and vivid in mind'.⁸⁷

Really original minds do not, however, fuss about originality,
and de la Mare's use of this ancient image of the door and gate, as
with his image of the house, does not jar. He used it in his own way
and, as all good poets do, gave it new life. For instance, not only
does he make the door or gate a symbol for the entrance to death, but
the house itself, as in 'The Old House', can be the house of death:

A very, very old house I know —
And ever so many people go,
Past the small lodge, forlorn and still,
Under the heavy branches, till
Comes the blank wall, and there's the door.
Go in they do; come out no more. . . . 88 (CP170)

He used this same image reversed to portray death as the shadow at the
door of the house of the world in 'The Dwelling Place':

All, all were children, for, the long day done,
They barred the heavy door against lightfoot fear;
And few words spake though one known face was gone,
Yet still seemed hovering near. 89
(CP124—26,vii)

(f) Symbol for Home

Although de la Mare's houses are so often mysterious, lonely,
haunted and, sometimes, sinister, he does also use this image in its
normal, everyday, social guise as a place of security, comfort and per-
manence — a home.⁹⁰ This is especially so when the subsidiary images
of hearth and fire, roof and walls are used. In this sense, as Luce

Bonnerot says: 'Elles sont une illusion de permanence avec leur intimité rassurante, symboles de cet enracinement que nous cherchons, comme elles le sont pour E. M. Forster'.⁹¹ This attitude is reflected in a review de la Mare wrote, where he described the hush-song as 'a music of dusk and candle-light, of four familiar walls and love and safety'.⁹² In *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* too, he created a kind of fairy-tale atmosphere of security and warmth:

They built such roaring fires on the hearth they squatted round that the sparks flew up like fireflies under the black, starry sky. Snug in their hut, the brothers would sit of an evening on their three stools, with their smoking bowls between their legs. ⁹³

David Cecil maintains that, in the whole context of de la Mare's work, this homeliness is superficial, and it is certainly true that behind the homely English settings, the apparently ordinary old ladies and the lonely, slim, narrow-shouldered children, there is often something strange, eerie and a little sinister. ⁹⁴

(g) Symbol for Paradise and the Goal

It is only infrequently, therefore, that de la Mare uses the house wholly in a 'natural' way as a symbol of the security and warmth of home. But when he does, he presents it as an epitome of home as 'the heart's desire' — our final happy and secure resting place. This is the great Romantic archetypal 'literary' image of home as our ultimate home, whether it be Heaven, Paradise or Valhalla. It is the end of life's quest and life's journey and the search for the Ideal, which is such a dominant motif in all de la Mare's work:

I am that Adam who, with broken wings,
Fled from the Seraph's brazen trumpetings.
Betrayed and fugitive, I still must roam
A world where sin, and beauty, whisper of Home. ⁹⁵

(CP201,i)

Such images as home, the quest and the journey towards the Ideal, like those of the house and the door, have literary antecedents reaching far back into the past. They were an essential part of, for example, the Scandinavian sagas, *The Odyssey*, the Arthurian quest, *The Faerie Queene* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, before even the Romantic poets with their characteristic voyager themes.⁹⁶ The Quest myth is central says Northrop Frye, and it is very probable that de la Mare, with his wide reading, was influenced by these 'literary' images. Indeed, his own poem *The Traveller* shows his debt to the many literary allegories which portray a traveller, whether on foot, on horseback or in a ship, on the physical journey to a spiritual goal.

A number of critics have commented on Henry Vaughan's apparent influence on de la Mare, and it is noteworthy that de la Mare reviewed the edition of his poetry which appeared in 1914. There he quoted Vaughan as saying that the business of a pilgrim is to seek his country.⁹⁷ Vaughan called that country 'home' in his poem 'Man', which contains images very similar to many that can be found in de la Mare's work:

Man hath stil either toyes, or Care,
He hath no root, nor to one place is ty'd,
But ever restless and Irregular
About this Earth doth run and ride,
He knows he hath a home, but scarce knows where,
He sayes it is so far
That he hath quite forgot how to go there.

He knocks at all doors, strays and roams,
Nay hath not so much wit as some stones have
Which in the darkest nights point to their homes,
By some hid sense their Maker gave;
Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
And passage through these looms
God order'd motion, but ordain'd no rest. (iii, iv)

It is in connection with this final concept of the house as a symbol for man's Paradisal home that, after discussing (in Chapter 7)

de la Mare's central image of the Traveller and his Journey, I shall go on (in Chapter 8), to consider in more detail the imagery of the Traveller's Goal. In these two chapters I hope also to show how the central images are linked to the many subsidiary images de la Mare used to form an holistic, symbolic pattern which may help us to 'penetrate to the heart and marrow of the poet', and find his 'prime and dominant concern'.⁹⁸

I hope I have shown from the foregoing discussion and analysis of the many ways in which de la Mare used the image of the house, how what I called his 'literary' and his 'natural' images overlap and, stemming from this, the unity of the ideas and images in his poetry (and, indeed, in his prose works). From this holism, I believe, the meanings of some of his more obscure poems may be elucidated by reading them in conjunction with others where there are similar images to signpost the way. In studying his imagery in this way, it is possible I think to show that his poetry is more interesting and relevant to life (albeit the life of the mind rather than to what is called man's social life), than his reputation as 'a purveyor of rather ghostly and whimsy poems' might suggest.⁹⁹

CHAPTER 7

IMAGERY II: THE TRAVELLER'S JOURNEY

'But there is a hunger of the heart and of the spirit no *thing* in the world can ever surely ease or satisfy.' *

(1) INTRODUCTION: THE TRAVELLER

Walter de la Mare's poem *The Traveller*, written in 1945 towards the end of his life, is the culmination in his writing of his own particular treatment of the important Romantic themes of the journey and the quest. It is romantic in conception and execution, but de la Mare's drama of the weary traveller on his journey to death is not so totally romantic (in the sense of it being unrealistic), that it loses vitality. One can identify in a modern way with this imaginative picture of man in his weakness and strength, man at his most pathetic and his most sublime — 'the eternal adventurer who cannot rest content'.¹ The landscape is romantic and strange, but no stranger than Eliot's *Waste Land*, and it has, in fact, a base in truth. For Mr Richard de la Mare says that his father had been very interested in the archaeological and geological problems presented by the Tiahuanaco ruins and Lake Titicaca in the Andes. In that area there is just such a stark, deserted 'lunar landscape' as de la Mare describes in *The Traveller*.²

As de la Mare pointed out to Russell Brain, the original concept which was to form the basic framework of the poem was that

the earth was alive, and if so it must have an eye, and the Traveller's landscape was the earth's eye. He went down to the eyebrow, then up the eyeball, over the white, and so reached the pupil, and the centre of vision. And there he looked into the abyss, and that was the end of him! ³

This is rather a crude representation of what obviously later became a much more complicated structure on two levels. There is firstly the detailed, concrete picture of a tired and discouraged traveller, accompanied by his life-like and sympathetically described mare. The man eats and sleeps and dreams, experiences day-break and nightfall, and is conscious of the bird and plant life around him as he journeys across stony plateau, mountain and valley, hungry, exhausted and dying at the end. Secondly, this traveller represents, perhaps, the spirit of man, or even the poet himself. He is a romantic and tragic hero, stoical in his search for the truth which he finds at last through humility and love, in a mystical experience, a spiritual revelation of the Divine presence which embraces everything and to which he is himself akin. This concept seems to have a close parallel in the poem 'My Spirit' from *Poems of Felicity* by Traherne, which uses similar images of the sphere, the eye and the divine light of God at the centre:

O wondrous Self! O Sphere of Light!
Emblem of Day most fair!
O Pow'r & Act, *next Infinit*
Like subtil & unbounded Air!
O Living Orb of Sight!
Thou that within me art, my Self! An Ey
Or Temple of a wide Infinity!
O What a World art Thou! a World within!
In thee appear
All Things, & are
Alive in Thee! super-substantial, rare,
Above themselvs, & near a-kin
To those pure Things we find
In His Great Mind
Who made the World! Tho now eclyps'd by Sin,
Yet this within my Intellect
Is found, when on it I reflect. (vi)

These Trahernian images, repeated in de la Mare's work, are probably based on the medieval idea that the sphere of the earth is the centre of the Universe. They are connected, too, with the archetypal symbols

of the quest for the Source of the waters of life, and for the Divine centre, whether this Centre be Eden, Paradise, Heaven or Home and the original innocence of childhood. They are all romantic and 'literary' images which, reflecting once again the holistic nature of de la Mare's writings, are also to be found in his earlier books of prose and poetry.

The anonymous writer of *The Times* obituary on de la Mare remarked that *The Traveller* 'is a parable that lies at the heart of perhaps every poem' he wrote.⁴ In the context of *The Complete Poems* of 1969 this may well seem a somewhat inaccurate statement, but there are at least twenty poems besides *The Traveller*, and many stories both for the adult and the child reader, where the traveller and his journey is an important motif. It was also used by de la Mare in his reviews to symbolise the course of life, both mental and physical: 'A wilderness and parched barrenness, darkness, and "horrors that make the heart stand still" lie in wait for the voyager through "The Mind of Man"'.⁵

It is evident that this image of the journey of life was implanted early in de la Mare's mind. He described the deep impression made on his young consciousness (even on his subconscious), by the sight of an advertisement hoarding which pictured the choice of two roads stretching away before a baby boy. One was the broad road to debauched ruin, and one the narrow road to prosperity. The baby, as the representative of humanity, has to make the choice. 'Perhaps', wrote de la Mare, 'it was solely the horror of growing old, in *any* direction, that filled me with dismay. Either conclusion to the long journey, at any rate, was disquieting'.⁶ The impact on him, at an early age, of this symbol of life's progress must have been reinforced by his wide reading in the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress* and other

Journey classics of literature, as well as fairy and folk stories, where there is often a journey and quest framework.⁷ The journey image was very likely, then, to have influenced his imagination when he came to write his stories and poems.

* * * * *

(2) CHRONOLOGICAL PROGRESSION OF THE JOURNEY IMAGE

Chronologically speaking, de la Mare's use of the journey image can be said to start with 'The Pilgrim' in *Songs of Childhood* (1902).⁸ In this poem can be seen, in brief, the Pilgrim's Progress theme, later to appear in a much longer and more sophisticated form in *The Traveller* (1945). For example, the grey, old pilgrim, lured on by a dream, bears his bundle alone on his long and lonely road. He is footsore, 'faint and weary', 'frozen, scorched, with ice and heat' and, in the thickening darkness, is attacked by evil forces in the guise of 'three wild Fiends' who flee away only when the sun flames out and a wondrous rainbow trembles in the air. The pilgrim's journey ends at last:

Marvellous sweet it was to hear
The waters gushing loud and clear;
Marvellous happy it was to be
Alone, and yet not solitary;
Oh, out of terror and dark to come
In sight of home! (CP24—26, xv)

So also, in *The Traveller*, there is a journeying man, solitary except for his faithful mare; he too dreams; he too is 'scorched heel to nape', is 'prostrate with thirst and weariness and woe'. And he is attacked in the darkness by evil — 'Foes of the soul there are, corrupt, malign' — until 'A strange and deepening lustre tinged the air'. This traveller too, at the end of his journey, finds the

divine waters, 'an immeasurable well / Of lustrous crystals', and the 'light divine', and comes at last to the archetypal Home, to

. . . the night-tide of the all-welcoming grave
For those who weary, and a respite crave:
Inn at the cross roads, and the traveller's rest . . . 9

(CP516,ix)

Next in the canon is de la Mare's fantastic novel, *Henry Brocken* (1904), although the traveller on horseback there is not used symbolically and the journey is not that of life. The story is only a vehicle for a youthful and highly imaginative exploration amongst de la Mare's favourite literary characters which, incidentally, betrays the literary antecedents which influenced him early and late. Here lie the lands and people which de la Mare loved 'on this side idolatry'. Henry rode out to explore them from his aunt Sophia's 'old roomy house', 'down the stony, nettle-narrowed path that led for a secret mile or more, beneath lindens, towards the hills'.¹⁰ In these pages we meet Wordsworth's Lucy, Jane Eyre and her dark-browed Mr Rochester in their tree-shrouded house, and Herrick's rosy maidens. We stray into the fairy-tale palace of *The Sleeping Beauty*, into Gulliver's land of horses (both being favourite images of de la Mare's); meet Keats's knight 'alone and palely loitering', Poe's Annabel Lee; and see the famed face of Chaucer's Criseyde. Quotations from all his favourite authors litter the pages — from Shakespeare, Shelley, Chaucer, Blake, Burns, Donne, Nash, Fletcher, Coleridge, Herbert, Crashaw, Webster, Landor and the Ballads.¹¹ The book is an unreal 'literary' creation, and the style to our modern ears is over-decorated and suffocatingly precious. It must however be considered an important early work because it shows de la Mare's command of the English language, his immensely fertile imagination, and it is crammed with

the 'literary' type of images which he used in his later work. Relevant, therefore, in the discussion of the traveller image are Chapters 9, 10 and 11, where de la Mare wrote of Christian's pilgrimage and Henry's meeting with the garrulous company in the Inn of the World's End.¹²

And though Henry Brocken is a shadowy and characterless hero, there is an affectionate, realistic and surprisingly unromantic portrayal of the old 'prosaic and trustworthy' mare Rosinante.¹³

Surely she is the prototype of the 1945 Traveller's 'comrade dear':

Ears pricked, reins dangling, thus a while she stayed —
Of that in watch above full well aware:
'See, now, dear master, here I wait!' She neighed,
And stooping, snuffed the rags, the matted hair. (CP516,iii)

In 1910, still in the context of de la Mare's prose work, came his poetic and romantic story for children, *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. This is also structured on the theme of the quest and the journey. The book can be read simply as an enchanting fantasy or, especially if the last chapter is taken into account, as an allegory. Such an interpretation accords well with de la Mare's preoccupation with the concept of the journey of life to a goal which is perhaps just death, or the attainment of some platonic ideal through a spiritual rebirth. As I have said, de la Mare was ambivalent in his meditations on death, and much of his work shows this questioning attitude, as in 'Self to Self':

If thou wake never — well:
But if perchance thou find
Light, that brief gloom behind,
Thou'lt have wherewith to tell
If thou'rt in heaven or hell. (CP298,iii)

That light beyond the gloom is symbolised in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* by Tishnar, the lovely, flowery valley, surrounded by mountains of unchanging snow. It was to Tishnar that the three little monkeys came after many hazards, sailing on their home-made rafts on an icy torrent

which swept, green and full and smooth, into a dark cavern in the mountainside.¹⁴ Tishnar, according to de la Mare, means 'that which cannot be thought about in words, or told, or expressed. So all the wonderful, secret, and quiet world beyond the Mulgars' lives is Tishnar — wind and stars, too, the sea and the endless unknown'.¹⁵ With these words in mind, one can read into the story of the three little monkeys on their long journey, the Pilgrim's Progress of Man, through life's difficulties and strange encounters to the peaceful valleys of his final Paradisal home.

There is in this children's book, which is poetry in prose of a high order, the same 'intense visual precision, combined with fantasy of scene' as can be found in *The Ancient Mariner*.¹⁶ The glittering landscape is also the landscape of much of de la Mare's poetry — a country of snow and silver frost, stars and moon — the light contrasted, as so often in de la Mare, with the dark of forest and cavern. Compare for example, from Chapter 3 of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*:

At last, their feet sore with poison-needles . . . their eyes aching with the darkness, the three travellers, on the eighth day, broke out of the dense forest into broad daylight and shining snow again. Down and down they descended into a frozen swampy valley,

with the opening lines of *The Traveller*:

This Traveller broke at length, toward set of sun,
Out from the gloom of towering forest trees;
Gasped, and drew rein: to gaze, in wonder, down
A bow-shaped gulf of shelving precipices. (CP501,i)

De la Mare's novels, *The Return* (1910) and *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), both have a journey and quest theme. However, in keeping with the psychological leanings of the modern novel of the time and his own interest in Freud and Jung, the emphasis in them is more on the search for the true self, as the protagonists Arthur Lawford and Miss M. struggle against the mental burdens life has inflicted on them.

Neither of these novels is very successful if (according to present-day thought) the essential ingredient of a successful novel be good characterisation. In neither has de la Mare been able to combine, as Henry James did in *The Turn of the Screw*, for instance, the strange or the supernatural with a frame-work of realistic life. Indeed, one must partly agree for once with Douglas Garman that, in *The Return*, de la Mare 'writes of a world filled with crude wax-works who take part uncouthly in a lifeless melodrama'; and that, in *Memoirs of a Midget*, Fanny lives, but the rest are 'lay figures' in 'an anaemic drama'.¹⁷ These two novels are interesting however because of the light they throw on de la Mare's general attitude to the life of the mind. Jung said that we could never become total man until we studied the obscurities in ourselves and, in this sense, *The Return* is a Jungian story. One can draw an analogy between it and *The Traveller* because it is also an allegorical struggle — a conflict of the soul. In *The Return* Lawford fights his second self and the evil forces in life. These forces are 'the foes of the soul' in *The Traveller*; the Evils which may prowl in 'The Others'; and 'the Fiend with his goads' in 'Haunted'.¹⁸

Amongst the poems in the main stream of The Traveller canon, 'The Journey' and 'The Listeners' both appeared in *The Listeners* (1912).¹⁹ In 'The Journey', there is also a lonely, footsore, parched and homesick wanderer like the 1945 Traveller, following an 'endless narrow road' to the beauteous eyes and 'the lips of welcome', which are his goal. An original stanza xiii, omitted from later editions, gives a picture of a pilgrim in the Bunyan tradition:

His shoulders were bowed with his knapsack;
His staff trailed heavy in the dust;
His eyes were dazed, and hopeless of the white road
Which tread all pilgrims must. (CP128)

In 'The Listeners', there is a shadowy and lonely traveller on horse-back, another forerunner of the 1945 Traveller, though the idea is not expanded into any clear allegory. Very little can be deduced about this traveller or his quest. In fact, he has less in common with the 1945 Traveller than with the proud young prince in 'The Revenant' who rode through the 'unageing forests' to 'a house of stone'; or with the 'self-sick wanderer' who, in *Winged Chariot*, also came through a dark forest to The Palace of Time — a silent, broken-turreted mansion.²⁰ J. M. Purcell said that he had been told at about fourth hand that de la Mare said that the imaginative impulse for 'The Listeners' came to him when he arrived for a school reunion and found himself alone and the building deserted.²¹ And his knocking on the door fits in with the lines in *Winged Chariot*:

'When what is beautiful is that no more,
Except as memory may its grace restore,
One's very heart stands listening at the door'. (CP560,ii)

The search for the Ideal or the Inner Companion is seen too in the king's soliloquy in 'The Revenant', which implies that the shadowy figure of the woman standing mute before him is a symbol for a long-lost part of himself:

Enter then, weave thyself, flesh, bone, into this frame,
And share the soul that brought thy Self to birth.
Come back, thou lovely and most harmless thing,
And be a child again, and innocent. (CP704—08,xii)

In de la Mare's work this image of the face or figure of a woman is a symbol of immense importance. She seems to be the image of the Ideal, the final goal of the traveller which, as I have said, can also be an innocent and imaginative other self or companion, from whom he has been parted by the adult and material world, and with whom he will be reunited in death:

But thou'rt beyond me, and wilt still smile on
Until death loose me too, and I a shade
Pursuing thee, past capture, in the tomb. 22 (CP708,xiii)

The haunted atmosphere and the isolation of the traveller in 'The Listeners' — the silence around him broken only by slight sounds that increase the effect of loneliness — is repeated in many other poems:

- (i) 'No voice ever answers me,
Only vacancy '
- (ii) A face peered. All the grey night
In chaos of vacancy shone
- (iii) In a zero, forsaken, marooned: not a sigh. 23
An existence denuded of all but an I.

In de la Mare's stories, too, there is very often a similar atmosphere of haunted and even sinister solitude. It is a constant theme in his work.

Perhaps the closest forerunner of the 1945 Traveller among the poems, in terms of landscape and imagery, is 'Defeat' in *Memory* (1938). It recalls John Masefield's poem 'The Dead Knight', which pictures a forgotten corpse lying amid the grass. The 'pitiful bones are laid at ease' among the rambling brambles and the straggling ivy which 'twists and creeps / In his eye-sockets'.²⁴ Compare with this de la Mare's stanza in 'Defeat':

Lost in eternal rumination stare
Those darkened sockets of a dreamless head,
That cheek and jaw with the unpeopled air,
With smile immutable, unwearying, share
The subtle cogitations of the dead. 25
(CP368—69,vii)

Masefield's landscape is, however, lush with vegetation, while that of 'Defeat' is nearer to the barren, weedless 'sterile world' of *The Traveller's* 'void savannah' (CP513,vi; CP504,ix):

The way on high burned white beneath the sun,
Crag and gaunt pine stood stark in windless heat,
With sun-parched weeds its stones were over-run,
And he who dared it, his long journey done,
Lay sunken in the slumber of defeat. (CP368,i)

In 'Defeat' too, there is an ominous, hovering, black bird, 'A raven, low in the air', like the 'winged thing, high in heaven, agape' in *The Traveller* — 'Sable in plumage, ruff and naked head', who watched and tarried for the dead.²⁶ The 'wild abyss' and 'vast plateau' in *The Traveller* are matched in 'Defeat' by 'the unfathomable drifts of space below', which 'stretched, like grey glass, an infinite low sea'.²⁷ In each there is a light of hope from the sun. In *The Traveller* it is 'That Eye of Heaven . . . Emblem and symbol of the light divine'; and in 'Defeat', 'a conflict of bright beams'.²⁸ And, although the dead man in 'Defeat', the earlier poem, appears defeated, ('Defeat was scrawled upon each naked bone'), in the last line there is a sign of hope ('the mockless victory that defeat may be'), which foreshadows the final victory in defeat of *The Traveller*:

. . . Ay, this poor Traveller too —
Soon to be dust, though once erect, elate,
From whose clear gaze a flame divine burned through;
A Son of God — no sport of Time or Fate. 29

With relevance to these images, there are interesting glosses to be found in a much earlier poem, 'Youth', in *Poems* (1906). Although it was written in a high-flown and turgid style which, thankfully, de la Mare did not persist in, the last lines seem important. For, taken in conjunction with the stanza quoted above, they suggest that the religious and mystical element in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (an important influence on the Traveller poems), may have played a more significant part in the imaginative scheme of *The Traveller* than is generally remarked upon by the critics, who tend to dwell more on its metaphysical than on its religious aspect:

God walketh in His brightness on the hills,
And sitteth in the wonder of the bow,
And calleth o'er the waters of delight: —
What were all Time to prove all gratitude?

What life's brief dust to Heav'n's unfading rose? ...
How fleet a foot then Youth's for long pursuit!
How high a courage to search wisdom out,
While he unwitting of't burns folly away!
Is aught too bold, too infinite, to dream
Fate's arm may guard for babes to spring from him,
Who flings his life down, drenched with rapture through,
To buy unchallenged honour for his bones?

(CP86)

Compare those last two lines with this stanza from *The Traveller*:

'Alas', he gasped — his journey now at end;
Breathed softly out his last of many sighs;
Flung forth his hands, and motionless remained,
Drenched through with day; and darkness in his eyes ...

(CP516,iii)

* * * * *

(3) USE OF THE 'LITERARY' IMAGE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE SONG OF FINIS'

De la Mare's traveller may be a pilgrim, a wanderer, a voyager, an exile journeying home, a rider or a knight on horseback.³⁰ In his poem 'The Song of Finis' (CP188), this knight on horseback is a romantic and literary figure, descendant of King Arthur's knights, of the lonely, loitering knight in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', or of the mounted knights in that most romantic and literary of poems, *The Faerie Queene*. This is the figure which appears in 'Tom o' Bedlam', an old, anonymous poem which de la Mare quoted in *Come Hither* and the last two stanzas of which he placed as epigraph to his *Henry Brocken*:

With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander:
With a burning spear,
And a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander;

With a Knight of ghosts and shadows,
I summoned am to Tourney:
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end;
Methinks it is no journey.

31

Many of the images and much of the atmosphere of 'Tom o' Bedlam' and de la Mare's own traveller poems are incorporated in brief in 'The Song of Finis', the last poem in his *Peacock Pie* (1913). It illustrates several noteworthy points about de la Mare's poetry, besides being an example, in small compass, of the traveller and horse theme.

Firstly, taken in its locale with 'The Pilgrim', 'The Wanderer' and other early journey poems, it illustrates, when compared with the much later *The Traveller*, that development which both Auden and Vivian de Sola Pinto saw in de la Mare's work. De Sola Pinto believed de la Mare to be a much more important poet than simply a poet of childhood, and described him as 'a philosophic symbolist' who 'developed progressively' from *The Listeners* of 1912 to *The Burning-Glass* of 1945.³²

W. H. Auden thought that de la Mare had been shabbily treated by anthologists, and that a gross injustice had been done to 'a poet who continued to mature, both in technique and wisdom, till the day of his death'.³³

Forrest Reid also perceptively stated that 'a seed is stirring in the ground — a feeling that belief, complete, final, may flower at any moment', and that an 'altered, deeper note' was struck by de la Mare in *The Listeners*, *Motley* and *The Veil*.³⁴

The Traveller of 1945, an altogether richer, more substantial and more thoughtful poem than the others in the canon, may be the flowering which Reid presaged. For there is a notable progression of thought from 'The Song of Finis', through 'Defeat', to *The Traveller*. There is a scepticism, even a nihilism, suggested in 'The Song of Finis' by the negative imprecision of the phrases 'No Bird . . . sang', 'No wind breathed', and by the knight's leap into the nothingness of space, which is akin to the nebulous atmosphere of 'The Listeners', 'Futility' and 'Outer Darkness'.³⁵

In 'Defeat' there is a more affirmative hint

of victory in failure; while, in *The Traveller*, there is a hopeful and positive attitude shown at the end. Here the horseman, though apparently defeated, exhausted and in rags at the close of his journey, is at the same time triumphantly aware that he has reached his goal in his search for truth — the divine light at the Centre, the Living Waters, Paradise or God — whatever the reader likes to imagine the final spiritual end of man to be. This is an optimistic outlook, based on the belief that love and courage in life are all-important, and that perhaps Death is not just a Nothingness, but a liberation of the spirit from the imprisoning earth. He implies that God is present behind the mysterious veil which, while we are on earth, prevents us from seeing the true reality. This optimism is seen also in a later poem 'Enigmas':

O from nefarious enigmas freed
Shall all that dies not live at last,
Obedient as the seeding weed
Unto fruition come indeed,
Its perilous blossoming past! (CP543,ii)

Of course, 'The Song of Finis' may be read only as a dream poem, especially when it is taken in conjunction with de la Mare's description of an old dream he had in *Winged Chariot*:

That dream I had of old — when, gazing sheer
Down verge of an abysm of stagnant air,
Senses as sharp as insect's, I could hear
Time's Ocean, sighing on the shingle there:

A whispering menace that chilled brain and blood;
Enormous, formless. Agonised I stood,
Tongueless with horror of what this forbode;

Yet lured on ever closer to its brim;
The night-long plunge; the gulf, vast, vaporous, dim;
That vault of Nothingness, the Nought of dream.

(CP573, i—iii)

This interpretation is possible because of the great importance de la Mare attached to dreams, as evinced in *Behold This Dreamer* and throughout his work.³⁶ But, in *Winged Chariot*, that 'Nought of dream' is followed almost immediately by the confident belief in some great Mind:

And never in Matter, surely, shall we find
Aught that is wholly inconsonant with a Mind
That thus conceived, evoked, informed its kind?
Else to forlorn Unreason we are confined. (CP573,vi)

This stanza tends to confirm the growth over the years of a more positive belief.

A second noteworthy point about 'The Song of Finis' is that it is a good example of de la Mare's capacity to incorporate into a simple poem, ostensibly for children, a complex set of associations which can appeal to the more thoughtful imagination of an adult. With its hint of ballad and folk-song, it can be read by a child on the fairy-tale level. To him, de la Mare with this romantic knight on a magic steed on a live-long quest, is here only the story-teller of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* or 'The Lovely Myfanwy' — the poet of the nursery-rhyme simplicity of 'The Horseman':

I heard a horseman
Ride over the hill;
The moon shone clear,
The night was still;
His helm was silver,
And pale was he;
And the horse he rode
Was of ivory. (CP137)

But, to many adult readers, 'The Song of Finis' may have other symbolic meanings, just as the thought of the pale horse of Death in *The Revelation* springs to the literate adult mind when reading 'The Horseman'.³⁷ Such poems can pose to them a 'large unanswered question', which is surprisingly enough often the case in de la Mare's supposedly children's poetry.³⁸

In 'The Song of Finis', beneath the romantic, fairy-tale veneer, the adult reader is almost bound to sense the loneliness and courage of Man confronting the great Unknown at the end of his long, punishing journey to Death — 'Yearning to scan the unseen, / To seek haven within the unseen'.³⁹ And, knowing how often the image of the horse appears in various guises in de la Mare's work, is he not likely also to wonder if it has any particular symbolic significance in this poem? Might he not speculate, too, on a possible analogy between it and the mare in *The Traveller*, the symbolic meaning of which has puzzled critics of that poem?

De la Mare used the image of the horse in both a 'natural' and a 'literary' way, and sometimes combined both. It can be a romantic steed, as in 'The Song of Finis'. It may be the simple animal companion of man, as in *Henry Brocken* — 'Man's best earthly comrade'.⁴⁰ De la Mare's affection for Henry's Rosinante shows particularly at the end of Chapter 8: 'I could but whistle and receive the slow, soft scrutiny of her familiar eyes. I fancied even her bland face smiled, as might elderliness on youth. She climbed near with bridle broken and trailing, thrust out her nose to me, and so was mine again'. Or, by symbolic extension with the word 'comrade', the horse could be perhaps the poet's own soul, the 'secret symbol' of his other self, as in 'The Assination' where, in dream, de la Mare sees a gentle, white horse with 'Eyes blue as speedwell', very similar to the mare in *The Traveller*, his 'faithful one':⁴¹

No marvel of beauty, or strangeness, or fable, this —
Una — la Belle Dame — hero — or god might ride;
Worn, aged with time and toil, and now at peace,
It cropped earth's sweetmeats on the stark hill's side.

(CP371—72,vii)

This interpretation is strengthened by the lines in 'Reconciliation':

Leave April now, and autumn having,
Leave hope to fade, and darkness braving,
Take thine own soul
Companion,
And journey on. (CP290,i)

De la Mare also used the horse as a symbol of man's imagination — the 'wild little Horse of Magic' in 'Suppose', and the Pegasus of so many of his reviews.⁴² It may be the horse of ideal beauty as in 'Dear Brother Horse'; the pale horse of death in 'The Dwelling-Place'; or the horse of Genius, as in 'To K.M.' — 'milk-pale, sleek-shouldered', like the white Arab in *The Traveller*, though K.M.'s horse is a 'Fantastical steed' of a more romantic pedigree.⁴³ In *The Traveller* the mare outlives her master, as genius may outlive the body. Significantly, in *Come Hither*, de la Mare wrote: 'Like bees, with their nectar and honeycomb, man stores up his knowledge and experience in books. These and his houses outlast him; the things he makes . . . Else, we have our Spring and Summer . . . then vanish away, seeming but restless phantoms in Time's enormous dream' (p.565).

The literate, adult reader, nurtured as he may well be on T.S.Eliot's archetypal *The Waste Land* of 1922, could also speculate on the possibility that the barren landscapes of both 'The Song of Finis' and *The Traveller* might epitomise the waste land of our modern world. To support this idea, there is an echo of a metaphor in an earlier poem — 'life's long cankering rust' — in the description of the knight's armour as 'red and thin with rust'.⁴⁴ Is the courageous knight here, with 'his face of skin and bone', not a forerunner of the dead man in 'Defeat', and of *The Traveller*, 'a mere castaway of flesh and bone, / Defenceless, lost, whom Fate will overwhelm'?⁴⁵ Perhaps these are the triumphant failures, the 'visionary host', 'Venturers, voyagers, dreamers, seers', akin to the

'lost adventurers' who greeted Browning's Childe Roland when he came to the Dark Tower? ⁴⁶ The answer lies in each reader's own imagination and, of course, in his own literary memory.

The third point of note is that 'The Song of Finis' is a good example of de la Mare's outstanding capacity for using language to enhance the meaning of a poem and to underline its ambiguity and suggestiveness. This is a difficult quality to analyse, as Owen Barfield recognised; but he attempted to do just this, in a paper in which he defends de la Mare against the critical charge of escapism in subject matter and the overuse of what is termed old fashioned poetic diction. ⁴⁷

I could not do better than quote him:

I have suggested that one of the principal advantages of poetic license is melodic. This is particularly apparent in the case of de la Mare, if I am right in my feeling that his peculium is his strange mastery in the manipulation of verbal sound as such. I would emphasize the "as such." Sound and meaning are not lightly separable . . . The melodic interaction and interpenetration of vowel-qualities and the shifting shapes and heavinesses and lightnesses of the consonants *are* the poem. The medium is the message in a sense that Marshall McLuhan couldn't dream of; for the sounds as such are somehow a spiritually solid object, a thing-in-itself. It is difficult to write about. 48

Barfield finds this quality in many of the poems in *The Listeners* and in 'still more perhaps of the ostensibly trivial lyrics in *Peacock Pie*'. He goes on to examine in detail 'the subtle evocation of qualities' in the poems 'England' and 'The Englishman', noticing de la Mare's 'delicate resort to archaism', and asserting that the use of archaisms and poeticisms is important and *not* extraneous to the perfection of the poems. ⁴⁹ Barfield's emphasis on the importance of sound in a poem is part of the creed of the modern linguistics school, which believes strongly that the form of a piece of writing — lexis, syntax and phonology — is an integral part of the whole meaning. This belief is well summarised by Gottfried Benn in his 1951 lecture, *Probleme der Lyrik*.

He says that words are the poem and (giving Stefan George as an example), that a poet is one who knows his words, knows how to handle them, how to order them into a satisfying poetic form: 'Aber die Form ist ja das Gedicht . . . Form ist der höchste Inhalt' (p.20).

De la Mare belonged to the modern school in his belief in 'close and assiduous workmanship'; that a poem's form gives it life, and that a poem's 'words *are* itself'. 'A fine poem means every single syllable and iota of what it says', he wrote.⁵⁰ In 'The Song of Finis', an apparently simple little poem, it seems to me that de la Mare exemplifies these beliefs. The intertwining patterns of sound and rhythm and other phonological techniques which he used there are, as Barfield suggests, an integral part of its atmosphere of mystery and of its prismatic meaning.⁵¹

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(4) USE OF THE 'NATURAL' IMAGE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE RAILWAY JUNCTION'

So far, in this study of the traveller image in de la Mare's work, I have looked primarily at the 'literary' type of image used in his poems, as in 'The Song of Finis'. In his short stories, however, where the journey motif is also strong, de la Mare (as Graham Greene pointed out), chose a more modern and everyday image — that of the railway.⁵² This is what I have been describing as a 'natural', in contrast to a 'literary' symbol. De la Mare tells us that he loved railway travelling and he seems to have been fascinated by travellers on the railway.⁵³ His railway passengers seem sometimes to be symbols of mankind travelling from birth to death. Each is alone on his journey in the railway carriage 'cage' of life (another persistent de la Mare image), although each traveller sees around him others of

whom he knows nothing.⁵⁴ De la Mare chose such a railway image, using also the image of the cage, in one of his reviews:

Just as, when the white electric glare of a railway goes out for a few seconds, and out of our upholstered cage we see suddenly loom up at the small oblong of window the wonderland of reality beyond and without — house, tree, meadow, countryside; spectral, lovely, dreamlike in wash of star or moon in the deep, spacious night; so this book transitorily illumines and revivifies for us a world to which we are habitually strangers. 55

And, in his story 'Visitors', Alice's words to Tom confirm the analogy: 'Life *is* a mystery, isn't it? I suppose in a sort of a way . . . life itself is a kind of a journey'. 56

De la Mare used this 'natural' image of the railway in a journey and quest poem, 'The Railway Junction' (CP295—96). The poem is interesting because, while having the same basic theme as 'The Song of Finis', it forms in other ways (for example in its imagery), a strong contrast to that poem. It also shows the significant interconnection and holism there is between his poems and his stories. And, once again, it is an example of his considerable mastery of the English language, which enabled him to match form and language to the thought and mood which he wished to convey. Interesting also is its more simple modern, conversational style, in contrast to the 'poetical' style and subject matter of 'The Song of Finis'.

'The Railway Junction' presents an ordinary, everyday scene at a railway station, simply described (although highly evocative), which is very different from the type of poetry popularly ascribed to de la Mare. For, as noted previously, on the basis of his early poems, he was dubbed escapist and accused of writing only of romantic things, using bookish, literary images and archaic diction. He was called a poet of fairyland, of magic, moon and twilight, of mysterious knockings on doors of haunted houses; a poet who wrote of Tartary and

Arabia and not of ordinary life. This poem, however, describes some down-to-earth characters like those of Arnold Bennett, which de la Mare commented on in a review: 'Every third-class railway carriage every day of the week yields such an assortment of our fellow-creatures as throngs *Clayhanger*'.⁵⁷ It resembles, too, other simple railway poems with a modern air, such as Hardy's 'Midnight on the Great Western', with its portrait of a boy in a railway carriage with a key hung round his neck — 'Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going / Or whence he came'; and Edward Thomas's 'Adelstrop':

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adelstrop — only the name. 58

This poem of Thomas's is well-known and much admired, and yet I think it is thinner and less well-constructed than 'The Railway Junction'. There is certainly deeper and more subtle thought behind de la Mare's poem than, say, Larkin's 'The Whitsun Weddings' or Betjeman's railway poems.⁵⁹

James Reeves, the contemporary poet and writer on poetry, finds 'The Railway Junction' 'curiously compelling' and with a great power of suggestion. He quotes it in full in his chapters on the lyric, as an example of the truth and naturalness and yet, at the same time, the uniqueness of the good lyric. Its diction is vivid and concrete, he says — yet, though he has read it many times, he has never been quite sure what it means. It does, however, show the loneliness of the human situation, and could easily be taken as an allegory of human life.⁶⁰ In studying de la Mare's work as a whole, and reading passages in his stories like 'Lichen' and 'The Bird of Travel', and others with a railway framework, it might indeed be concluded by analogy that such an

allegory was at the back of de la Mare's mind. In 'The Bird of Travel', for instance, Elizabeth says: 'And now . . . goodbye, for this life. Yours that way; mine this', which echoes stanza iv — 'But not their way'. And in 'Lichen', the old gentleman, Sam Gilpin, who sits on the bench on the sunny, flower-bedecked platform, reciting his epitaphs into the ear of the young lady narrator, replies to her remark, 'You see we *must* go on': '"*Must* go on," eh? And soon, too, must I', which echoes stanza iii — '. . . at the appointed hour, / I shall myself be gone'.⁶¹ In each case it seems clear that the references are to death at the end of life's journey. De la Mare's comment on Thomas's 'Adelstrop' provides a gloss on this: 'Some time in life "the express train" for most of us draws up at Adelstrop. If so, please heaven, the immortal moment bringing the peace, understanding, and reconciliation which are the recurrent theme of these poems, is ours'.⁶²

Not without relevance perhaps to the hidden significance of the poem is the way in which, whether by subconscious or conscious design, de la Mare juxtaposed certain poems in the various volumes of his verse, so as to suggest a kinship of metaphor or idea between them, thus seeming to elucidate the meaning of one by the other. For example, 'The Railway Junction' appears in *The Fleeting* (1933) immediately after a poem 'Good Company'. In this latter poem there is a significant contrast between 'the old convivial inn', which seems to be a metaphor for the everyday, lively world, and the picture of the mute, stark sailor lying dead on the 'empty night-road to the sea'.⁶³ 'The Railway Junction' suggests, metaphorically, a similar contrast between life and death with the pictures of the busy, worldly company just departed by train, and the solitary, quiet person left on

the platform. It persuades us that 'the appointed hour' is the time when death will come.

A further similarity between 'The Railway Junction' and de la Mare's short stories with railway settings is in the solitariness of the principal traveller. Isolation and loneliness are important elements in de la Mare's poems and stories. His characters are often solitaires, as they are in the poetry of that other great Romantic, Wordsworth.⁶⁴ Lonely mankind is symbolised by figures similar to the narrator in 'The Railway Junction', who is left sitting in solitude on the platform after the throng has departed. The story 'Willows' opens with the words: 'The 2.17 P.M. this lovely, sleepy, precocious afternoon left only one passenger behind it on the wooden platform of the minute country station of Ashenham'; and the first paragraph of 'The Creatures' contains the sentence: 'I stared over the flat stretch of waters, then turned my head, and looked with a kind of suddenness into the face of my one fellow-traveller'. That traveller remarks: "'It's a queer experience, railway-travelling . . . One is cast into a passing privacy with a fellow-stranger and then is gone'". He continues: "'as if, my dear sir, we are not all of us visitors, visitants, revenants, on earth, panting for time in which to tell and share our secrets, roving in search of the marks that shall prove our quest not vain, not unprecedented, not a treachery'".⁶⁵ This is an observation which appears to exemplify well de la Mare's own attitude to life, so often recorded in his poems and stories.

The passengers in 'The Railway Junction' seem to be a cross-section of questing humanity, each of them going on a journey either to the hills or to the sea by the forked railway track. There appears to be some kind of symbolic connection between this miscellaneous group in

the poem and similar groups in *Memoirs of a Midget* and 'Lichen':

But at the next stopping places other passengers climbed into the carriage; and five complete strangers soon shared the grained wood box in which we were enclosed. There was a lady in black, with her hair smoothed up under her bonnet, and a long pale nose; and up against her sat her little boy, a fine fair, staring child of about five years of age. A black-clothed, fat little man with a rusty leather bag, over the lock of which he kept clasped his finger and thumb, quietly seated himself . . . In the corner was an older man with a beard under his chin, gaiters, and a hard, wide-brimmed hat. Besides these, there was a fat countrywoman . . . and a dried-up, bird-eyed woman opposite in a check shawl, with heavy metal ear-rings dangling at her ears. 66

But it was I who 'passed on' — into the security of a 'compartment' filled with two fat commercial-looking gentlemen asleep; a young lady in goggles smoking a cigarette; a haggard mother with a baby and a little boy in velveteen trouserettes and a pale blue bow who was sucking a stick of chocolate, and a schoolboy swinging his shoes, learning geography, and munching apples. A happy human family enough. 67

In the poem, and in the novel and the story, the detailed and concrete descriptions of the travellers give an impression of their extreme separateness of identity, and thus of their solitariness. Each vignette contains similar contrasting figures of male and female, young and old, country and townsfolk; and in each there is a mother and child and a figure in black. The images of the cage, the locked bag, the security of the 'compartment', and the idea that it is a wooden box, all tend to remind us of that image of death — the old oak chest in 'The Riddle'.

Typically, 'The Railway Junction' ends on a question mark, like the inconclusive endings of so many of de la Mare's stories and poems. Each character in the stories seems to be, like de la Mare himself, trying to find an answer to life. 'What can life be about? What does it mean?', asks Miss M. 68 They may be seeking an escape from their body, trying to find their 'real' self or spirit lost in childhood — like Nora in 'The Face', or Jean Elspeth in 'Lucy'. 69 They may be looking for a world beyond this material world: perhaps the *elixir vitae*

represented by the sunken reservoirs in 'The Vats'; or the lost garden of Eden symbolized by the multitude of flowers in the strange, wild garden of 'The Creatures'; or the radiance of perfect beauty like that of the secret diamond in 'The Lost Track'.⁷⁰ They may be looking for Death like Alice in the haunted garden of 'The Looking Glass', or the children in 'The Riddle'.⁷¹

I commented previously on 'The Riddle', as being capable of various symbolic interpretations, and this story is another example of the unexpected depths to be found in de la Mare's work for children. It is included in his *Collected Stories for Children* (1947) and, like 'The Song of Finis', can be read on a fairy-tale level. But it is also, for the adult reader, a prose poem which has a subtle under-meaning. It is connected to de la Mare's journey and quest poems and stories by means of the similar and favourite images it shares with them. The grandmother's spacious old house, so like that of Thrae in *Come Hither* and the farmhouse in 'The Creatures', seems to symbolise the great house of Nature and the World. The seven children explore the house in the same way that Man travels through the various rooms of experience in the world, on his journey to death. The progress of the seasons marks the decades of life from youth to old age. Compare, for example, the poem 'Voices', where de la Mare depicts symbolically the whole cycle of life by a single day's progression from dawn to dusk:

Who is it wandering in the summer meadows
Where the children stoop and play
In the green faint-scented flowers, spinning
The guileless hours away?
Who touches their bright hair? who puts
A wind-shell to each cheek,
Whispering betwixt its breathing silences,
'Seek! seek!'

(CP71—72,ii)

The old oak chest, with its slowly-closing lid, is an image similar to the door or gate which de la Mare used so often as a symbol for sleep, dream and death.

I call this story a prose poem because its content and technique seem to be more what we associate with poetry than prose. Prose may, of course, be rhythmical and melodious and contain various so-called poetic figures of speech. But, on the whole, the prose writer is primarily intent on communicating fully and in a straightforward way matters of fact, whether they be of concrete reality, of intellect, or even of the imagination. On the other hand (as Niels Bohr said), the poet is not so concerned with describing facts as with creating images. De la Mare himself said that it is not what poems are *about* that greatly matters: the poet's object is to communicate some intense emotion or vision 'beyond the reason wholly to explore'.⁷² In so doing, he may use sensuous imagery, rhythm, rhyme and various phonological and lexical-ordering devices to a far greater extent than the prose writer. His poetry will probably be imaginative, musical, suggestive and, especially in the lyric, in a highly condensed, elliptical style; for he tends to strip his utterance of everything but the bare essentials in a way the prose writer does not. Poetry must insist, said de la Mare, 'on the rigorous necessity of leaving out'.⁷³ Compare, for example, the five short lines where de la Mare describes his travellers in 'The Railway Junction' with the longer description of a similar group in *Memoirs of Midget* already quoted:

But not their way: the bow-legged groom,
The parson in black, the widow and son,
The sailor with his cage, the gaunt
Gamekeeper with his gun,

That fair one, too, discreetly veiled — (CP295,iv,v)

De la Mare said that we recognise a good poem by its effect;⁷⁴ and, in 'The Riddle', by borrowing many characteristics from the rhythms, imagery and phonological techniques of poetry, particularly alliteration and repetition (of which he was a master), he gives just such a poetic effect. He used the texture of the language subtly to create an atmosphere which turns a very simple progression of events, in surroundings which are quite ordinary (except for the mysterious chest), into a highly evocative allegory on a quite different level of communication. The following paragraph illustrates this 'poetic' quality:

It was evening twilight when Henry went upstairs from the nursery by himself to look at the oak chest. He pressed his fingers into the carved fruit and flowers, and spoke to the dark-smiling heads at the corners; and then, with a glance over his shoulder, he opened the lid and looked in. But the chest concealed no treasure, neither gold nor baubles, nor was there anything to alarm the eye. The chest was empty, except that it was lined with silk of old-rose, seeming darker in the dusk, and smelling sweet of pot-pourri. And while Henry was looking in, he heard the softened laughter and the clinking of the cups downstairs in the nursery; and out at the window he saw the day darkening. These things brought strangely to his memory his mother who in her glimmering white dress used to read to him in the dusk; and he climbed into the chest; and the lid closed gently down over him. 75

The poem 'The Railway Junction' appears to have much in common with this piece of prose. It is concise, apparently uncomplicated, bare of simile and metaphor except in so far as we take it to be an allegory of life. Its diction is plain, almost prosaic, with no syntactic or linguistic deviancy. All this gives a sense of concrete immediacy and a quite 'modern' tone. On closer examination, however, there is an elaborate (but unforced) pattern of stanza, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance which is not, as many critics who dislike de la Mare's style of writing imply, merely the work of an accomplished technician — a clever wedding cake glitter.⁷⁶ This

technical pattern does not just conjure up a vague, poetic mood, but forms, as in 'The Song of Finis', an organic part of the poem's oblique meaning. ⁷⁷

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(5) IMAGES OF TIME AND THE FINAL GOAL

'The Song of Finis' and 'The Railway Junction' are contrasting aspects — the 'literary' and the 'natural' — of de la Mare's Traveller and Journey images. Inherent in both is the image of the End, whether that end be death and the unknown, or the attainment of some final, long-sought goal. His journey image may be a track or path with no seen beginning or end, as in the story 'The Lost Track', or in the poem 'The Listeners'. Or it may be a circular track, as in the poem 'The Round' (CP310), where he describes an earwig travelling round and round the rim of a vase 'In circumambulation drear'. ⁷⁸

In 'Full Circle' the same image appears:

It's many — Oh, ages and ages, Mother,
We've shared, we two. Soon, now:
Thou shalt be happy, grown again young,
And I as old as thou. 79 (CP308)

Similarly, in 'The Corner' (CP430—31), Old Mister Jones goes into reverse and reverts to being a baby. And, in the circular verse story 'Sam's Three Wishes' (subtitled 'Life's Little Whirligig'), the final stanza ends:

*For all sober records of life (come to write 'em)
Are bound to continue — well — ad infinitum!*
(CP219—24)

This image of the circle is a 'literary' one, and is perhaps borrowed from Traherne and the medieval idea of the sphere of the earth, with its Eden or Paradise being at the centre of the universe where, for

de la Mare as for Traherne, the original innocence of childhood is metaphorically to be found. As Traherne wrote in 'Innocence':

I was an Adam there
A little Adam in a sphere. (xiii)

De la Mare's meditations on time, which culminated in *Winged Chariot*, seem to be based on this idea that the life of Mankind and this Earth is an endless circle: 'All is flux; nor stays but changes on'.⁸⁰ In a poem ostensibly for children, 'Then as Now', de la Mare wrote:

Then as Now; and Now as Then,
Spins on this World of Men . . .
Count your hardest, who could tell o'
The myriads that have come and gone,
Stayed their stay this earth upon,
And vanished then, their labour done? (CP445)

Sometimes he appears to be thinking in terms of a parallel track of life (as in his railway images), on the analogy of the modern science fiction concept of parallel time; as in 'The Unrent Pattern':

I roved the Past — a thousand thousand years,
Ere the Egyptians watched the lotus blow,
Ere yet Man stumbled on his first of words,
Ere yet his laughter rang, or fell his tears;
And on a hillside where three trees would grow —
Life immortal, Peace, and Woe:
Dismas, Christ, his bitter foe —
Listened, as yesterday, to the song of birds. 81
(CP500)

To de la Mare in this mood, man's existence is nothing in the perspective of Time, against the backdrop of Nature's ancient rivers and forests. He comes and goes, as he does on the railway, leaving little impression behind him. He is still but an Adam, even in this modern world, searching on his long journey for the 'pure daybreak' and his final goal of Eden, his Heaven and his Home.

CHAPTER 8

IMAGERY III: THE TRAVELLER'S GOAL

'The artist's truth is multiple: truth of conception . . . truth of idea, of imagination, of execution, and above all of feeling; truth to himself, to his aim, to his spirit, to some inward influence or presence, to his fair or dark angel, of whom he can give no more evidence than that which in him lies to reveal and to commemorate.' *

(1) THE MYTHIC PATTERN: EXILED MAN AND HIS JOURNEY TO EDEN

In Walter de la Mare's own simple words, the traveller's goal — his divine home — is 'where one would be'.¹ But until he reaches the end of his journey, he is an exile in this world of apparent reality, shackled by the iron weight of material things, and thus prevented from immediately attaining that goal. Only occasionally does he catch brief symbolic glimpses of it. This picture of the shackled traveller is expressed, in brief space, in a simple little Blakeian poem, 'Eyes':

O strange devices that alone divide
The seër from the seen —
The very highway of earth's pomp and pride
That lies between
The traveller and the cheating, sweet delight
Of where he longs to be,
But which, bound hand and foot, he, close on night,
Can only see. (CP203)

Comparison of 'the cheating, sweet delight' in this poem with 'The sweet cheat gone' in 'The Ghost' (CP197), makes it appear likely that 'the sweet cheat' is not (as Duffin implies, p.119), the lost human lover, but the ideal, spiritualised figure or face symbolising the goal of mankind. In similar metaphorical vein, de la Mare wrote in one of his reviews that Vaughan, Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, Blake, Rupert Brooke, and other poets have been 'wanderers and seekers,

weather-beaten venturers, exiles . . . longing for a return to a home that seemed half a dream and only half a memory'.² Certainly he must have felt himself to be one of this company of poetic exiles.

In his symbolic universe, of which this long-sought Home is the centre, de la Mare made use of many and varied images, mostly romantic and 'literary', but also 'natural', and these appear both in the poetry and in the prose, as already shown. All are plaited together, the strands appearing sometimes in one symbolic connection, sometimes in another. These images are very often associated with the ancient, so-called archetypal, themes of an earth or mother figure, and man's craving to return to the womb or to some Paradisal home.³ The various symbols and the typical vocabulary he used form in his work a kind of mythic pattern which it seems important to identify in any study of his poetry.⁴ This image pattern is as follows:-

Man's spirit, like a captive bird, lies bound down in the dark, shadowed cage or prison of his earthly body and the earthly world.⁵ He is a homesick exile often, as in 'Home', craving death and oblivion to ease the burden of his banishment from his ancient, Edenic home:

Rest, rest — there is no rest,
Until the quiet grave
Comes with its narrow arch
The heart to save
From life's long cankering rust,
From torpor, cold and still —
The loveless, saddened dust,
The jaded will. 6 (CP133—34,i)

Yet, however long 'the arduous day' seems, he must persevere to the end in his travels towards Paradise. That Paradise may be called (in 'literary' style) variously the Isles of the Hesperides, Elysium or, more usually, Eden.⁷ This Eden is the fertile, flower and light-filled valley garden of *Paradise Lost* rather than the flowerless garden

of Genesis.⁸ It is peaceful and serene, bathed by the waters of life in river, rill or sea, and is beyond the stars, far on the other side of the distant and glacial mountains and the dark forests through which he must journey.⁹ The country he at length reaches is akin to Vaughan's 'Countrie / Far beyond the stars', and his 'shady City of Palme trees', where grows 'The Rose that cannot wither'.¹⁰

This Eden symbolises for de la Mare both the lost innocence of Mankind — 'the garden of paradise which in our folly / We abandoned long ages gone' — and Man's own happy childhood before the door of material adult life closed him off from the visionary gleams of his fertile and free-flowing imagination.¹¹ That was the time when he was nearest, in a Platonic sense, to his divine home. 'The immortal child in man lives on', wrote de la Mare. 'He lives on in a conquered paradise which for want of a better word we might as well call Eden. Alas how few of us can recapture it'.¹² Mankind is cut off from this paradise by a veil or door — symbols of the mystery of life and death and the natural world — and only occasionally does the door or gate swing open, or the veil momentarily part, to enable us to glimpse a vision of what we seek. Eden's beauty comes back to our memory in sleep or dream or reverie, or when we sense some thing of mortal beauty, be it some marvel of nature or the music and art of Man.

What we seek, whether it is rest, peace, permanence, or some divine certainty and love, is very often symbolised in de la Mare's work by the face of a beautiful woman, and this image can take many forms: 'A thousand cheating names hath she'.¹³ The search for her can be interpreted variously. It can be the search for self-fulfilment in life and art, using the metaphor of the *ánima*, the *alter ego*, the inward companion, with which man strives to be reunited.¹⁴ It may be

the search for the lost knowledge and innocent imagination: or the search for the Platonic ideal: the search for the mystery at life's end — over the 'crystal verge' and through the wicket gate of death.¹⁵ Or it may be the search for the Divine Light, a Spirit or a God which, when reading de la Mare, we can never be sure is there or not. The experience of death alone can provide the answer. According to him, love is the only thing on earth which can give us some foretaste of our lost Edenic home.¹⁶ That is why it is difficult to decide whether these poems by de la Mare about a remote, beautiful woman are actually love poems to a human lover (as Duffin suggests), or poems to this imagined other self or inner companion, or to some ideal spirit or beauty — or perhaps a combination of all three. It is needless to speculate. For de la Mare (as previously noted), love was all-important. It helps us to travel 'the long, flinty highways of the world', and the longing for human love is akin to our divine homesickness.¹⁷

The images of Paradise and the spiritual vision of Beauty, of prison, exile and the voyage, are basically of the 'literary' type. But de la Mare also used many simple 'natural', pastoral images like bird, flower, river, forest, valley, mountain and star in his symbolic pattern. When he used these, however, he touched them all with a strangeness, a romantic or biblical mystery, which binds them into his own, unique 'literary' myth. I should, therefore, like to examine some of these images, which are subsidiary to the theme of the Traveller, the Journey and the Goal, later in this chapter.

(2) SOME SOURCES OF DE LA MARE'S IMAGERY PATTERN

I am inclined to believe, as I think many modern critics do, that an analysis of a poet's imagery is not harmful to an appreciation of his art. On the contrary, objective analysis can be blended with subjective response and detailed knowledge of the whole body of the poetry and other writings, to bring into focus the main thrust of de la Mare's thinking, and to clarify his kinship with Traherne, Vaughan, Blake and Wordsworth. It might also help to establish his position as an important poet in the Romantic tradition and in the mainstream of English literature. It is surely no longer possible to have to dub him 'an unfashionable outsider', and to allow his general academic reputation to rest merely on his place in the Georgian group of poets and on a handful of anthologised poems, as seems to be the case at the present time. ¹⁸

Although it is true that de la Mare wrote almost entirely in the style of the nineteenth century and in the romantic idiom — particularly in regard to his diction and imagery — this is not the whole story. It might be thought that he went on being a Victorian till his death, and that he was a living anachronism — a Victorian in a modern world — in the context of the twentieth century modernist revolution brought about by writers like Pound and Eliot. But what makes him interesting, saving him from relegation to an out-dated Victorian romanticism, and also marking him off from the easy certitude and almost exclusively pastoral, uncomplicated imagery of most of the Georgian poets, is his modern doubting and questioning habit of mind. Particularly now, in this second half of the twentieth century, his apparent interest in psychology, in dream, and in another world of unused senses, seems very up-to-date, although this modern attitude is often hidden under the

trappings of his traditional romantic style. However, modern colloquialisms (even slang), the modern taste for the conversational mode, and modern preoccupations and images, are clearly visible in some poems. 'The Feckless Dinner-Party' (CP281—82) is a good example of this, as are parts of his long and unaccountably neglected poem *Winged Chariot* (CP551—96). This more up-to-date manner is associated at the same time, in a somewhat Eliotian way, particularly in *Winged Chariot*, with a 'literary' and archaic diction and romantic embellishments. The sparer and more colloquial style of these and some of the later poems tends to support the view that de la Mare progressed from the early over-poetic language to a more modern simplicity and a deeper contemplation and questioning.¹⁹

One is reminded, in certain respects, of Hardy and, more remotely, of Clough, both of them very much Victorians but with a similar, modern, ambivalent, doubting attitude of mind. In an age of conformity in the mid-nineteenth century, when Victorian stability and assured faith seemed to be at a high point, Clough for instance, with other young intellectuals, was an agonised sceptic. In a letter to his sister in 1847, he wrote about his beliefs, suspending judgement in religious matters: 'Until I know I will wait'.²⁰ This statement might almost be taken as de la Mare's own motto. Of course, there is no very obvious likeness between Clough and de la Mare, and certainly not at all in style or tone; but there are many lines in Clough's poetry which seem to foreshadow both Hardy's and de la Mare's questioning attitude to life, and also other aspects of de la Mare's thought and imagery. Remember, for instance, Claude in that poem of typical, solid Victorian life and standpoint, *Amours de Voyage*: 'I wander and question, unsatisfied ever'.²¹ Then compare it with de la Mare in his auto-

biographical poem 'A Portrait': 'One yet how often the prey of doubt and fear,/ Of bleak despondence, stark anxiety' (CP454, xiv).

Like de la Mare and Hardy, Clough believed that the world is a beautiful place, but that it can be like a prison:

But for the steady fore-sense of a freer and larger existence, —
Think you that man could consent to be circumscribed here into action?²²

Although Man can know nothing of the nature of God, yet he must search for some spiritual Ideal immanent in the known world — something akin to Hardy's 'Great Face' or de la Mare's 'Vision grave':²³

Does there a spirit we know not, though seek, though we find, comprehend not,
Here to entice and confuse, tempt and evade us, abide; ²⁴

and like them, too, Clough thought earthly love could be the fore-shadowing of this ideal:

That she is but for a space, an ad-interim solace and pleasure, —
That in the end she shall yield to a perfect and absolute something.²⁵

There is an impulse in these poets which drives them on in the pursuit of their ideal. They are smitten by doubt along the way, and their work is permeated by ambivalence and questioning, often symbolised, interestingly enough, by the railway image. Clough wrote in typical fashion:

Shall we come out of it all, some day, as one does from a tunnel? . . .
Who knows? Who can say? It will not do to suppose it. ²⁶

De la Mare would have agreed with him in saying that 'life at the best will appear an illusion'.²⁷

In both poets there is this oscillation of feeling between scepticism and idealism. In *Dipsychus*, for instance, Clough dramatises in dialogue form the imaginative and realist sides of man's soul struggling for supremacy — the aspiring, mystical mood answered by the satiric spirit of conformity. But Clough was more of what the moderns call a realist than de la Mare, and his poetry is often rough

in technique and bitingly satirical, which de la Mare's very rarely is. And, while Clough believed that the end of poetry is, or should be, primarily moral, de la Mare was absolutely against the didactic in poetry.

But Clough was not in the Romantic line. Some have argued indeed that in him were some of the seeds of the Modernist movement in the twentieth century. To find the real source of de la Mare's basic pattern of imagery, we must go further back — to Wordsworth's great Immortality Ode and, through him, to Blake, Vaughan and Traherne. Forward, the line is continued by Edwin Muir and Dylan Thomas. All these poets subscribed to the Romantic and Platonic conception that it is the pure and innocent child, the symbol of the childhood of the world before the Fall, who will lead us to our goal of light, happiness and peace, because he has recently been (in the pre-birth time) so near to the Divine.

De la Mare is very well-known as a writer who concerned himself much with childhood. As well as his many poems for children, he wrote children's stories and re-told for them fairy stories, animal stories and stories from the Bible. It is not surprising, therefore, that childhood and the child played a large part in his scheme of imagery, and those poets who valued childhood, like Traherne, Vaughan and Wordsworth, must have been often in his mind. This is obvious from the number of times he quoted from their works. Vaughan's 'The Retreate' and Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* seem specially to have attracted him. To him Wordsworth was 'a supreme poet', and 'an intuitive and imaginative genius'.²⁸ De la Mare quoted liberally from all these poets in his anthology-cum-essay on children and childhood, *Early One Morning in the Spring*, and

especially from Wordsworth. He summarised the theme of *The Ode* there in Chapter 24 and, in his Introduction to *Poems for Children*, he quoted the whole of stanza ii (pp.xxv—xxvi). He again quoted the last line of this stanza, 'That there hath passed away a glory from the earth' in the Introduction to *Love* (p.liv); and in *Early One Morning* he quoted four lines from stanza v, beginning with the Platonic idea, 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting' (p.24). De la Mare also obviously knew *The Prelude* well. In *Early One Morning* he summarised Wordsworth's early experiences described there, and noted that, in his 1786 sonnet 'Calm is all nature as a resting wheel', are 'the first intimations of what was to be the theme of his famous Ode' (p.539).²⁹

In fact, there is a close parallel between the images used by Wordsworth in his Ode and those used by de la Mare in his own symbolic scheme. Duffin cites de la Mare's poem 'The Phantom' (CP70—71), as giving 'brief lyric expression to the theme which *The Ode* developed so definitely', although he considers there are in it only 'a few slight verbal parallels'.³⁰ However, in reading all de la Mare's work which touches on childhood and the child, it becomes possible to see the striking similarities of image and theme. Take, for example, lines such as the following from poems by de la Mare, and note how they echo some of the ideas in *The Ode*:

- (i) Retrieving the wisdom
I lost, when a child
- (ii) But words are shallow, and soon
Dreams fade that the heart once knew;
And youth fades out in the mind,
In the dark eyes too
- (iii) Better than that, it were to stay the child
Before 'time' tamed you. When you both ran wild
And to heaven's *Angelus* were reconciled

- (iv) And he? — the sport of contraries in sleep! —
To childhood had returned; gone grief and woe;
That Eden of the heart, and fellowship
With innocence, that only children know. 31

In his poems about old age, the same concept of the lost innocence and fertile imagination of childhood is seen too, as for example in 'The Old Men':

Old and alone, sit we,
Caged, riddle-rid men;
Lost to Earth's 'Listen!' and 'See!'
Thought's 'Wherefore?' and 'When?' (CP206)

Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* is an outburst of anguished regret for what is lost as the adult moves further and further away from the happy innocence of his childhood, when he still had glimpses of his divine pre-birth life. As can be seen from the quotations listed above, phrases in stanza i of The Ode, such as 'The glory and the freshness of a dream' and 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more', were echoed by de la Mare, and the 'celestial light' of this stanza is paralleled by the Traveller's vision of 'the light divine'.³² The old Romantic images which Wordsworth used in stanza ii to describe the beauties of nature — rainbow, rose, moon, stars, water, night and sunshine — are ones which de la Mare was not ashamed to use himself. Although, for both these poets, such natural objects are beautiful, to neither do they quite make up for the glory, 'the visionary gleam', which has passed away from the earth when childhood has gone. Both take up Vaughan's idea that all things here on earth, though impermanent, reflect for Man the permanent things of heaven:

And looking back (at that short space,)
Could see a glimpse of his bright-face;
When on some gilded Cloud, or flowre
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity. 33

Both subscribe to Vaughan's Platonic idea that the child, since he has walked only a mile or two from God, has come to this earth 'trailing clouds of glory'.³⁴ Wordsworth wrote: 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy', and as we grow older 'Shades of the prison-house begin to close' about us and we daily travel further from our Paradise in the East until 'the vision splendid' disappears. In the Introduction to *Come Hither*, de la Mare said that Simon's object at the beginning was to get to a place called East Dene which, in the anagrammatic system of the story, can be translated into Eden. Simon's mother had told him that 'Ages ago . . . an ancestor of our family had dwelt in this place' (p.vii).³⁵ In stanza vi of The Ode Wordsworth portrayed the Earth as Mother and Nurse, and we are again reminded of *Come Hither*, where Simon is looked after by Miss Tarune (Nature) and Linnet Sarah.³⁶ Man is Nature's foster child, said Wordsworth, and she tries to make him forget his old Home, the glorious 'imperial palace whence he came'.³⁷

One of de la Mare's favourite images is the eye, and this image is in stanza viii of The Ode — Wordsworth's apostrophe to the Child, the 'Eye among the blind'. It is noticeable that in de la Mare's poems about his 'Vision grave' he usually gives prominence to the eyes as being grave, steadfast and changeless. Luce Bonnerot comments on the importance of this symbolism:

Visage d'ange ou de madone, et idéal platonicien tout ensemble, dont les yeux surtout ont hanté le poète — lumière spirituelle et havre de stabilité vers lesquels tendait tout son être . . .³⁸

In Wordsworth's Ode, immortality broods over this 'Seer blest', until he falls under the inevitable yoke of the gathering years (de la Mare's prison image), when custom will lie upon him 'with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life'. Stanza ix contains the Romantic

image of the healing waters, that 'immortal sea' where 'the Children sport upon the shore, / And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore'.

This is the *elixir vitae* of de la Mare's story 'The Vats':

Yet within the lightless bellies of these sarcophagi were heaped up, . . . floods, beyond measure, of the waters for which our souls had pined. Waters, imaginably so clear as to be dense, as if of melted metal more translucent even than crystal . . . It is indeed the unseen, the imagined, the untold-of, the fabulous, the forgotten that alone lie safe from mortal moth and rust . . . We knew now and for ever that Time-pure *is*; that here — somewhere awaiting us and all forlorn mankind — lay hid the solace of our mortal longing. 39

In Wordsworth's *The Prelude* too, there are images and ideas which are echoed by de la Mare. 'Fare Well' (CP218), with its expression of his belief in the continuity of the past and future, and the hope that the beauties of nature, 'these loved and loving faces', will, when he has gone, still 'Please other men', reminds us, not only of the final stanza of Wordsworth's Ode, but also of the lines in the last section of *The Prelude*: 'What we have loved; / Others will love'.⁴⁰

Both de la Mare and Wordsworth (with Coleridge and other Romantics) believed in the vital importance of the imagination; both loved solitude; and both believed that earthly love was all-important. 'Love is life's liberty' said de la Mare, and Wordsworth wrote:

. . . By love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love, 41
That gone, we are but dust. . . .

Both poets were nurtured on fairy tales and confessed how much they owed to books.⁴² One might repeat, of de la Mare in particular, what he wrote of Milton, although in de la Mare's case, the gods and goddesses and the classic landscapes were mostly replaced by the inhabitants and scenes of the land of Romance:

How much his poetic imagination and his poetry itself were affected in later years by this glut of book-learning is clear in a positive sense. It became at last a magic mirror in his hands, reflecting with his own supreme and substantial splendour the gods and goddesses, the demigods and heroes, cities, palaces and classic landscapes that as a child he had imaged in it. 43

Wordsworth's concepts of spots of time in *The Prelude* is seen again in de la Mare's *Winged Chariot*:

But drifts of living, eventless, feelingless,
Lapse out unmemoried into nothingness. 44
Instant and timeless are our ecstasies. .

(CP580,vii)

Both made use of another great Romantic image, that of the cavern and stream. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth wrote:

. . . we have traced the stream
From darkness, and the very place of birth
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
The sound of waters; follow'd it to light
And open day, . . .
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
The feeling of life endless, the great thought 45
By which we live, Infinity and God.

The most memorable example of this image in de la Mare is in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, as the monkeys at their journey's end drift out of the dark cavern under the mountain to the peace of the valleys of Tishnar. De la Mare, like Wordsworth, felt that it is in dreams that we can return most easily to the blessed state of childhood and innocence. *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, though full of arresting detail, is a dream story, and there are many dream poems of his which reiterate the following lines from an Ode by Wordsworth:

Such hues from their celestial Urn
Were wont to stream before my eye,
Where'er it wandered in the morn
Of blissful infancy
For, if a vestige of those gleams 46
Surviv'd, 'twas only in my dreams.

De la Mare's long poem 'Dreams' (CP347—53), for instance, describes the 'Regions of beauty, wonder, peace', the 'Enchanted foothills far away' to which the Dreamer may attain. In sleep he may even glimpse 'Life's citadel':

A hollow inwoven orb of light,
Thrilling with beauty no tongue could tell.

But, as so often with de la Mare, these dream pictures of peace and beauty are closely followed by contrasting pictures of terror:

Gaunt terror leads him by the hand
Through demon-infested rank morass;
O'er wind-bleached wilderness of sand. 47

A similar picture is drawn of the drear Palace of Time in *Winged Chariot*:

'What though once-Eden now is sour morass,
The abode of croaking frogs and venomous flies,
Yet, which of us, alas,
Can not in his own visage darkly trace
That blighted Seraph's face? ' (CP560, iv)

This is the reverse side of the coin depicting Paradise and the Ideal face of the 'Impossible She' — Satan and the Waste Land of our modern world indeed.

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(3) DE LA MARE'S ROMANTIC CONTEMPORARIES

Of course, the influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge on the poets of the Romantic tradition in the nineteenth century was immense, but it is interesting to see how, even in the twentieth century, two contemporaries of de la Mare, Edwin Muir and Dylan Thomas, followed this same line and were preoccupied with the Platonic vision of childhood and Eden.

Edwin Muir was a romantic who, like de la Mare, ignored the modernist revolution and defended the English lyric tradition.⁴⁸ He, too, strove to return to his childhood Eden through his imagination. For

him, as for the Romantics, the adult world destroyed the child's glimpse of Eden. Many of his poems are based on dreams, for he also felt that dreams are a part of reality. He suggests, as de la Mare did, that the real world is a visionary 'other' world, apart from our empirical world. In this world of 'firm good earth' there is no exit:

It is a world, perhaps; but there's another.
For once in a dream or trance I saw the gods
Each sitting on the top of his mountain-isle, . . .
And their eternal dialogue was peace . . .
That was the real world; I have touched it once,
And now shall know it always. 49

He gets brief glimpses of Eden; then the everyday world interrupts and the vision fades. Like de la Mare, Muir relied on the metaphor of life as a journey and used the traveller image. His traveller endeavours to find the Light and the 'drowned original of the soul'.⁵⁰ Also, like Wordsworth and de la Mare (and other romantics), he used the image of the stream leading to our journey's end:

There is a stream
We have been told of. Where it is
We do not know. But it is not a dream,
Though like a dream. We cannot miss
The road that leads us to it. Fate
Will take us there that keeps us here.
Neither hope nor fear
Can hasten or retard the date
Of our deliverance; when we shall leave this sand 51
And enter the unknown and feared and longed-for land.

Muir, however, seems to have had a much stronger Christian faith than de la Mare. He rediscovered Christianity in 1939 and introduced Christian symbolism into his poetry, for example in 'The Transfiguration'. In that poem is his vision of 'the clear unfallen world', which Man has never seen 'Since Eden locked the gate that's everywhere / And nowhere'.⁵² That is the same 'pure daybreak' world of de la Mare's 'The Exile' (CP201).

Like Edwin Muir, Dylan Thomas saw the image of Eden in the rural scenes of his childhood, as he remembered in 'Fern Hill':

. . . it was Adam and maiden
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise. (iv)

He personifies Time as a thief who waits to rob the child of his visionary innocence.⁵³ And he, too, saw the presence of God in man's natural environment, as he wrote in 'Over Sir John's Hill':

I open the leaves of the water at a passage
Of psalms and shadows among the pincered sandcrabs prancing. (ii)

Although he was not a religious poet in the conventional sense like, for instance, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who wrote that 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God', he saw the presence of God in man's natural environment — 'The country is holy'.⁵⁴ His view of reality, too, was the same as that of Muir and de la Mare, as he showed in 'Our Eunuch Dreams':

Which is the world? Of our two sleepings, which
Shall fall awake when cures and their itch
Raise up this red-eyed earth? (III,v,21—23)

Perhaps one ought to ask why de la Mare is neglected while these two romantic contemporaries of his, with much smaller outputs, are academically fashionable.

All these romantic poets are, of course, putting into poetry a basic archetypal yearning of the human being, seen in a simple form in the Negro spirituals with their theme of anguished longing for a happy eternal Home in this world of slavery and sorrow. As Maud Bodkin says, there is a deep need in man, a finite creature, for a relation with something infinite and eternal.⁵⁵ De la Mare's poetry is permeated

with this yearning, although it is only rarely, as for example in *The Traveller*, that he allowed any hint of a hopeful outcome to Man's search for a satisfying goal. Much of his poetry is melancholy and pessimistic, but usually it is a gentler, more resigned pessimism than that of Hardy, whom he described as 'this master of the desolating'.⁵⁶

Hardy portrayed the world as a dark, imprisoning place, 'narrowly pinched and pent'; Edwin Muir thought of the everyday world as a labyrinthine, endless maze from which there was rarely an exit except in dream — 'I'd be prisoned there / But that my soul has birdwings to fly free'; and Wordsworth in his Ode wrote of the 'shades of the prison-house'.⁵⁷ It is easy to see the line of communication with de la Mare and one of his favourite images, the bird in a cage. For him it was a symbol of man's captive spirit in the prison of the world or, as for example in the case of the miniature-statured Miss Midget, the free and imaginative spirit imprisoned in the cage of the body.⁵⁸ Indeed, *Memoirs of a Midget* carries an epigraph from John Webster which illuminates the importance of the metaphor for de la Mare:

'Did'st thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass; and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison. . . .'⁵⁹

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(4) THE CAGED BIRD AND RELATED IMAGES: DISCUSSION OF 'THE CAGE' AND 'THE MONOLOGUE'

Birds seem to have an important place in de la Mare's work. He wrote a great many poems about them. Most are simple descriptive poems suitable for children, like 'A Goldfinch' (CP410), 'Jenny Wren' (CP314) and 'The Thrush' (CP817—18), similar to those which form the

larger part of the collection under 'Beasts of the Field; Fowls of the Air' in *Come Hither*.⁶⁰ But he wrote other more serious poems in which he used the bird as a symbol, and his imaged Paradise is full of birds and birdsong. Russell Brain tells how, when they were discussing birds while de la Mare's pet budgerigar was flying about the room, de la Mare said: 'there is something human about the feelings of those birds; the sparrow is different from what you normally think of a sparrow as being. Must not their feelings be qualitatively the same as ours? Mind may differ in quantity, so to speak, but can it differ in quality?'⁶¹

De la Mare's symbolic birds are often white and may remind us of Yeats's 'Wild Swans at Coole', Baudelaire's swan and the white swan in Eden of *Paradise Lost*. In *The Golden Bough* Frazer quotes many old stories and myths about the external soul of a human being inhabiting the body of a bird, and however well hidden and far off that bird may be, if it is sought out and killed, the body of its distant master will also die.⁶² For de la Mare, with their beauty and their tip-tappings on roof or window, and their wild song, birds seem to be messengers who summon us, or some inmate of our hearts to a lost country, a hidden homeland, to Death or Paradise:

Why should a bird in that solitary hollow
Flying from east to west
Seem in the silence of the snow-blanced sunshine
Gilding the valley's crest
Envoy and symbol of a past within me
Centuries now at rest? 63 (CP459,i)

In his story 'Visitors', a prose companion to this poem, de la Mare tells of a boy Tom, 'born to be a traveller', who once saw two strange birds with coral beaks, and white as snow: it seemed to him 'as if he had been looking at them for ages and ages under the huge

shallow bowl of the March sky. He dreaded every instant they would lift their wings and fly away. That would be as if something had gone out of his own inmost self'. When he asks his nurse Alice to explain these wondrous birds to him, she says:

'What I mean is that it doesn't follow even if they *was* real that they didn't mean something else too. I don't mean exactly that such things do mean anything else, but only, so to speak, *seem* that they do. All depends, I suppose, in a manner of speaking, what they are to us, Master Tom.' 64

The poetical motif of the bird in a cage seems a natural outcome of de la Mare's love of birds and his interest in them. In many of his poems he used words which summon up this prison image:- cage, prison, guard, bound, immure, bars, cell, imprisoned, penned, captive, key, celled, nets and dungeon, for example. 65 I should like to discuss two in particular which are based on this theme — 'The Cage' (CP198) and 'The Monologue' (CP239—40) — because they echo the images in Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, and because de la Mare's expansive treatment of the cage and prison motif in them helps to clarify those other poems where he used it more fleetingly.

In 'The Cage', the three metaphors — cage, sea and vision — with their overtones of contrast and the synaesthetic linkage, sustain the overall concept of exiled and imprisoned Man journeying through a dark and bounded existence towards some longed-for goal of ideal beauty and peace, which he can only occasionally glimpse through the medium of memory or dream. 66 One can also see in the poem de la Mare, the poet, yearning to be reunited with the inner companion, the *alter ego* of his poetic imagination, so often fettered by the restricting cage of the material world. 67 This latter interpretation is supported by the poem 'The Imp Within', where the caged bird image is used again, in reference

to his Muse:

Constrain imagination; bind its wing;
Forbid the unseen Enchantresses to sing. (CP225—26,iv)

The 'Vexed Spectre' of this poem reappears in 'The Spectre' (CP232—33) and seems to be the poet himself, perhaps brooding on the toil of the review work he had to do to earn money, while the voice of his imagination calls to him to allow his Muse the freedom to write the poetry he loves. ⁶⁸

'The Cage' contains extraordinarily rich literary echoes. Plato, the Bible and the English Hymnal, Webster, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, Tennyson, and Rossetti all spring to mind. The image of the cage may recall Blake, Webster and Wordsworth; the desolate sea, Arnold, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*; the homeless voyager, Ulysses, the Wandering Jew and the Prodigal Son; and the Vision, Rossetti's blessed Damsel and other beauties of Romance. The 'homeless dark' in stanza ii has a Blakeian feel. It calls to mind Blake's line, 'The night was dark, no father was there', quoted by de la Mare in a review in which he also wrote: 'Most of us stumble on our journey in a fickle light and beset with cheating shadows'. ⁶⁹ In small space thus 'The Cage' illustrates many of the literary sources which influenced de la Mare. It also contains a large number of the elements which make up de la Mare's pattern of imagery: the bird in the cage, music and whispering echoes of sound, stars, the sea, the wandering voyager, the steadfast eyes of the vision of beauty, memory, and nostalgic sorrow. Also seen here is the importance to de la Mare of the contrast between light and dark which pervades his work.

De la Mare appears very conscious of the Christian idea of the Divine Light, although, of course, there is a universal archetypal belief

not necessarily Christian, that the Gods dwelt in light and the forces of evil in darkness. Because of his close knowledge of the Bible, de la Mare's consciousness would surely have been steeped in such phrases as 'I am the Light of the World', and also in the story of Christ's Transfiguration.⁷⁰ In contrast to this Divine Light, which was the central goal in *The Traveller*, earth for de la Mare was a dark and shadowed place; he wrote of 'Earth's darkness and dole' in 'The Bottle' (CP288—89,vi). Man lives in shadow but remembers the light.⁷¹ In this respect he has affinities with Blake who wrote: 'God appears, and God is Light, / To those poor souls who dwell in Night', and with Shelley: 'That Light whose smile kindles the Universe'.⁷² De la Mare's phrase 'Earth's darkness and dole' accords with the Romantic concept of the Platonic cavernous shadow as Coleridge and Blake saw it. Coleridge thought that this world is only a shadow of a larger reality; and he believed in an original corruption in our nature, from which we may be redeemed by Christ in some mysterious way. De la Mare had none of this absolute Christian surety. He hovered between hope and fear of what will come after death — the divine light or darkness and oblivion; though, like Milton, he often wondered whether '. . . earth / Be but the shadow of heav'n'.⁷³ Blake, too, in his *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, wrote: 'Though on Earth things seem Permanent they are less permanent than a Shadow as we all know too well . . . There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature'. In *Desert Islands* de la Mare echoed this when he said that the island dwellers had converse with that 'bright world whereof this is but a shadow' (p.257), as he did in 'Youth':

Earth but a shadow is of beauty cast
In trembling beams upon the stream of Time

(CP85—86
lines 60-61)

and in 'Music Unheard':

And all I love
In beauty cries to me,
'We but vain shadows
And reflections be.' 74

(CP116,iii)

The theme of 'The Cage' and other similar poems is summed up by
de la Mare himself:

The old Adam, the happy prehistoric child in every one of us, in response to this incantation harks back in spirit to the garden of his banishment; wherein Eve awaits him, and he can be once more happy and at peace, the veil withdrawn, all old enmities forgiven and forgotten, amid its beauties and life. 75

This shadow or veil, which is another of de la Mare's favourite images, cuts off the dark material world from the light of Paradise. Sleep may lead us momentarily through the veil and put us in touch with our own imaginative insight, and death can split it and let us see the divine light. For example in *Behold This Dreamer*, he wrote: 'Nature itself resembles a veil over some further reality of which the imagination in its visionary moments seems to achieve a more direct evidence'; and Mr Anon says that 'all things visible are only a veil'. 76 This is not the Christian concept of Francis Thompson in *The Hound of Heaven*: 'Is my gloom, after all, / Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?' It is more in the nature of Shelley's 'Death is a low mist which cannot blot the brightness it may veil' in *Adonais* (xliv). 77

The Divine Light that Man on this dark earth longs for, is hinted at in stanzas i and ii of 'The Cage' and, in stanza iii, it is personified, by implication, in the still figure of the Vision with the 'steadfast eyes' and the 'folded hands'. In some of the Vision poems

the lovely Face is veiled, as in 'The Disguise': 'O, thy veiled, lovely face —' (CP203—04,vi), thus following the same metaphor of the veil, discussed above.

In 'The Monologue' (CP239—40), the Vision is, in fact, invisible.⁷⁸ The poet-narrator believes, however, that it is imprisoned in the cell next to his, though he cannot be sure of this. It is his own imagination which supplies the idea that its caged cheek is whitening and the thin breast wasting (iv). There is the same questioning note here as in 'The Listeners', whose 'Is there anybody there?' is echoed in stanza ix:

Is it to Vacancy
I these tidings tell?
Knock these numb fingers against
An empty cell?

The image of the caged bird in stanza ii, fluttering against the prison bars, is similar to the bird image in 'The Cage' and reinforces the likelihood of a parallel interpretation for the two poems. The nostalgic 'wild memories' in stanza iii of 'The Cage' are echoed in stanzas iii and v of 'The Monologue': the harvest-fields, green streams and hills of the lost Country, which recall the country of long-ago innocence and childhood of Vaughan, Traherne and Wordsworth's poems, and de la Mare's own 'The Remonstrance':

. . . Quite forgot
Lay the sweet solitude we two
In childhood used to wander through;
Time's cold had closed my heart about;
And shut you out. (CP200,ii)

Is the 'Lovely One' in 'The Monologue' the lost inner companion of the poet-narrator's childhood and imagination, the *alter ego* or *anima* of Jung (like the 'vision grave' of 'The Remonstrance'), which is separated from him by the prison walls of the world? Torture and

death, symbolic of the aridity of material life, of the waste land of the world, await him and only the hope that he and this inner, immortal spirit of his will be reunited keeps him from despair.

De la Mare's ambivalent feeling about this second or double self is made clear in his review of Edward Thomas's *Last Poems*. He seems to be writing about himself when he says that Thomas was 'always in quest of a fleeting elusive spirit — call that spirit what we will — beauty, peace, content, oblivion'. That spirit is 'in every aspect of Nature':

Is she indeed within or without? May it not be that 'other', that tormenting indiscoverable 'double', that second self, his very image, whom he pursues from inn to inn, picking up rumours of him, queer, disquieting, provocative, who shall at last keep tryst with her, when these twain meet and are one? 79

This is the same inner self which he described in *The Traveller*, that 'listens in the heart / To what is past the range of human speech' — the scarcely visible mote, Himself, which gazed back at the Traveller from the immeasurable well (CP515,v,vi,ix). De la Mare wrote again about this inner self in the Introduction to his *Poems for Children*:

There is a Self. And this earthly existence is a sort of shadow-picture in motion of that self. It is a poor metaphor, but it resembles the changeful, blurred reflection in muddy water of what for a very long time indeed has been there upon the bank. (p.xxix)

De la Mare used these same images of the self, the face and the reflection or mirror image in some of his stories. In 'Lucy', the once young Lucy returns in old age to the home of her childhood and sees herself reflected in a pool. What she saw there was 'a face, fair, smiling as of one eternally young and happy and blessed'.⁸⁰ Nora, in 'The Face', fell into a pond when she tried to see herself in the muddy waters. As she came up through the water she saw a 'strange, phantom face . . . smiling, seraphic, unchanging, the eyes faintly

luminous, the cheek narrowing softly to the chin, the hair drawn gently backward from the brows'.⁸¹

There are several possible interpretations of 'The Monologue'. The lovely fellow prisoner may be the symbol of this inner self which is at its most near and clear in the days of childhood. It may be the Ideal for which Man is ever striving; or some loved one who has passed Death's threshold. It may be the poet's Muse (as in 'The Cage'), one of the 'unseen Enchantresses', and perhaps one may find here another hint of the artist's frustration, a longing for the surety of his own ability, inspiration or genius. This is an interpretation made more likely if one refers again to 'The Imp Within' (CP225). The birds with their 'coursing wings' in stanza iii of 'The Imp Within' can be compared with the 'deluded bird' in stanza ii of 'The Monologue', and the 'crock of bone-dry crusts ('The Imp Within', i) with the 'longed-for crust' ('The Monologue', viii). These dry crusts could be symbolic of the profit motive involved in hack-writing; stanzas viii, ix and x seem to be an expression of the poet's dislike of this work. He wonders, perhaps, if his artistic inspiration and genius is still alive on the other side of the 'transparent' wall of the everyday world where he is involved in such 'hated toil' ('The Imp Within', iv). There is another poem, 'The Outcasts', where he describes the burden of fame and seems to feel that much of his work is worthless:

'I was a writer — and of some repute, . . .

'Year after year the burden grew apace;
Fame, that old beldame, shared my bed and board;
No Christian, in his pilgrimage to grace,
Bore on his back a burden so abhorred.

(CP475—76,
vii, viii)

He rids himself of this burden into the river, having seen at his door,

one midnight, a face 'tranquil as a dove'. Once again, the face and the inner companion come together in de la Mare's imagery: 'With some lost ghost in me I fell in love . . .' (xiv).

There is a strong tradition in English lyrical poetry for, as Shelley put it, sweet songs 'that tell of saddest thought' — Virgil's *lacrimae rerum*. De la Mare's 'The Cage', like its near companion in Motley, 'The Ghost' and like many of his poems, strikes the same note of sadness and fits into the musical and memorable tradition of Tennyson's 'divine despair', Emily Brontë's 'memory's rapturous pain', Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'unforgotten pain', and the sad songs of Christina Rossetti.⁸² They are all part of the heritage of lament and elegy in English poetry, seen in such poems as Bishop King's 'Exequy to his Dead Wife', Milton's 'Lycidas', Shelley's 'Adonais', Arnold's 'Thyrsis' and Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', though in a shorter lyric vein. De la Mare quoted many poems in this genre in the section entitled 'Like Stars Upon Some Gloomy Grove' in *Come Hither*. The smooth euphonious flow and effect of generalised nostalgic yearning of 'The Cage' is typical of this mode of lyric poetry.

'The Monologue' deals with a similar nostalgic yearning. At its centre (stanza v), is the concept of the lost country, the prisoner's longed-for home, the caged bird's resting place, where the narrator hopes to be reunited in freedom with the 'Lovely One'. The metaphors of the bird, the tapping on the prison walls and the inner self have their prose equivalent in de la Mare's story 'The Bird of Travel', when Elizabeth, the beautiful and mysterious lady of the wood, says:

But there, never mind, when *my* bird wings free, I know its resting place. I *know* it. You see? The ones that have gone — they changed little; but strangely and instantaneously. And now they thrid some finer air, have rarer senses, and their tap is heard on walls of the mind that are scarcely there, so tenuous they are. . . . What *is* that old phoenix of ours?

Do you suppose we could snare him, cage him; tie him to a perch?
Isn't he in our very minds? How then? Could we be else than wanderers?
83

This 'resting place' of Man the Traveller, when he is at length freed from the fetters of earth, is the lost country of childhood innocence, truth and beauty, and is often symbolised by Eden and the lovely vision of Eve, the poet's Ideal. 'The true artist is faithful to something beyond the virtues of his medium: to some prototype or ideal of which his work can be even within its range only faultily representative. And that we call Beauty'.⁸⁴

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(5) THE IDEAL FACE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE VISION'

The 'inward influence or presence', de la Mare's 'fair or dark angel', represented by the tranquil, shadowy vision incompletely visualised in 'The Cage' and 'The Monologue', gradually takes on more detailed features in his other poems. The 'steadfast eyes' and 'folded hands' of 'The Cage'; the 'cold brow' of the Lovely One in 'The Monologue'; the 'Visage serene, calm brows, and braided hair' of *Winged Chariot*; the 'steadfast eyes' and mute lips of the Angel in 'It is a Wraith'; the 'clear grave dark eyes' of 'Thou art my Long-lost Peace'; the 'ghostly lips and eyes' of 'The Remonstrance'; the glistening cheek of the forlorn Shadow in 'The Familiar'; and the long-lost face and comforting eyes in 'Out of a Dream', all culminate in a poem called 'The Vision'.⁸⁵ Here is depicted the beautiful, remote 'starry face, bound in grave strands of hair', the 'hands faintly sweet with flowers from fields unseen', the 'Breasts cold as mountain snow', and the 'Eyes changeless and immortal and serene', which has been hinted at so often in the other poems. Here is the clearest

picture of this symbol of man's Ideal and final goal — 'Life's haunting mystery' and 'changeless vision'. It is the archetypal face of the springtime bride, the earth mother, a mixture of the classical beauty of Venus, Eurydice and Helen, and of the Angel, Seraph and Eve of the Bible. There are hints too of the Christian Madonna and of the angel face of Spenser's Una, perhaps calling to mind the lines from Newman's 'Lead Kindly Light':

And with the morn those Angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile. 86

This ideal vision has been the subject of much poetic inspiration down the centuries, but de la Mare's serene visage is not just a cliché image. It is something unique to him. It is conceivable that, were de la Mare better known as a poet, it might deserve a place with Helen of Troy, Dante's Beatrice, Keats's La Belle Dame sans Merci, Goethe's 'das Ewig-Weibliche', Shelley's Spirit of Beauty, and Leonardo da Vinci's Angel, with which de la Mare compared it in *Love*: 'I once out of a waking dream looked up into a face of a loveliness that even Leonardo's angel, in his Virgin of the Rocks, could only rival' (p.lvi). This face haunts de la Mare's work, and he describes it again and again. It appears, for example, in 'Dreams':

Enigmas these; but not the face,
Fashioned of sleep, which, still at gaze
Of daybreak eyes, I yet could trace,
Made lovelier in the sun's first rays; 87 (CP352,xxxii)

in *Behold This Dreamer*:

There appeared in the dark field of vision, and against a pearly-grey background, a chalk-white and very beautiful face which, as I watched it intently, began subtly to change in feature until at length it resembled a face familiar to me. Then this too began to change, as if it were formed of wood-smoke (p.89, footnote)

Perhaps the loveliest face I have ever seen . . . continued to haunt my waking eyes — poised in the air a few feet above my face as I lay in marvel watching it, many years ago, from my pillow (p.92)

and also in his stories. The vision of the face appeared (as previously noted) in 'Lucy' and 'The Face', but it is also referred to in 'Winter' ('strangely and arrestingly beautiful was that face'), and in 'Out of the Deep':

The child was still waiting. Quite quietly there — as if a shadow, as if a secret and obscure ray of light. And it seemed to Jimmie that in its patient face hung veil upon veil of uncountable faces of the past — in paint, stone, actuality, dream — that he had glanced at or brooded on in the enormous history of his life. That he may have coveted, too. 88

De la Mare gives us a clue to the symbolism of this image of the face in his poetry thus: 'Such poems . . . bear witness to the beauty and gravity of a face that never wearies the dreamer, because, though it is the symbol of the everlasting, it is never the same for a century, an hour, a moment together'. 89

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(6) SUBSIDIARY IMAGES: MUSIC AND THE ISLAND

In both stanzas of 'The Vision', de la Mare speaks of music — 'Music unheard' (i, 4) and 'haunting harp-string' (ii, 1) — and it seems that music was for him an essential part of his idea of Paradise. Often the vision of the face is accompanied by sweet sound or a beautiful voice. His poems 'Music' and 'Music Unheard' express the idea that lovely music, like other beauties of the material world, can be the reflection of some eternal spiritual beauty, and hearing it increases the poet's desire for his lost Eden.⁹⁰ In 'Music' (CP199) there appears once more the vision of an enchanted face, though this time it is the beauty of Naiads rising from the water at the sound of the music. They are inhabitants of the resplendent world before the Fall, and belong to the little company of minor classical, mythic

figures — nereids, dryads, Pan and Eros — which de la Mare used in a decorative way, and to suggest something unattainable which we can occasionally glimpse in everyday life, as the Old Angler did when he caught his slim Naiad and she

Drew backward, smiling, infatuate fair,
His life's disasters in her eyes,
All longing and folly, grief, despair,
Daydreams and mysteries. 91 (CP226—28,xxi)

'What else', asked de la Mare in *Love*, 'are the pagan divinities, the woodland nymphs, the sylphs, the Shades, Pan, Eros, demon, seraph, archangel, but the ethereal embodiments of power and of ideas?' (p.cix).

De la Mare loved music. As a choral scholar at St. Paul's, he had music all around him during his childhood and, later in life, as Richard de la Mare tells us, he became even more interested in it when the new gramophone records came out after the first World War.⁹² He told Russell Brain that, at school, they had thought the three best composers were Bach, Mozart and Handel who, incidentally, were all composers noted for their skilful elaboration and intertwining of musical themes.⁹³ His partiality for such composers may explain his liking for the technique of linking and weaving of themes and sounds which can be observed in his verse, as if he had been trying to emulate the music that Milton describes in *L'Allegro*:

. . . with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony. (lines 139—44)

De la Mare's penchant for the short lyric sprang possibly from his delight in 'tiny music'. He told Brain that he thought modern orchestras were too large and loud, and that Handel and Bach had been content with small orchestras.⁹⁴ It is noticeable, too, that he added

the sound of birdsong and the music of wind and water to the Eden he described in his own account of the Creation from Genesis in *Stories from the Bible* (p.7).

The island is another of de la Mare's images subsidiary to the main Traveller/Journey/Goal image. He used it in different ways, rather as the symbolism of Shakespeare's island in *The Tempest* alters in chameleon fashion the more it is studied. *The Tempest* seems to have been one of de la Mare's favourite Shakespeare plays. Ariel and Prospero are mentioned very often in his work, and Caliban's beloved paradisaical island which 'is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not',⁹⁵ appears in *Winged Chariot*:

Flame was its beauty, and the sea its bliss;
Its every sound a secret music. Yes,
An island such as in *The Tempest* is —

Imaged in words, but Thulë of a mind,
Not only Shakespeare's, but of all mankind:
That which blest Poetry alone can find....

(CP595,v,vi)

For de la Mare the island may be the symbol of the home and goal of the traveller, a kind of Paradise, as in 'Come!':

From an island of the sea
Sounds a voice that summons me, —
'Turn thy prow, sailor, come
With the wind home!'

(CP60,i)

This is the archetypal island image, akin to Homer's enchanted isles or Tennyson's happy isles. Or it may be a dream vision, as in 'An Island':

An island, lit with beauty, like a flower
Its sea of sapphire fringed with ocean's snow,
Whose music and beauty with the changing hour
Seemed from some inward source to ebb and flow. ⁹⁶

(CP462,ii)

It can also stand for the country of the imagination, of romance, a

Treasure Island'ablaze with emerald and sunshine', the spice islands, the mountains of the moon, symbol of escape and adventure and solitude as in his glittering anecdotal jumble, *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe*. Sometimes he used it as a symbol of our world, islanded in the universe, 'a celestial solitary', or, as in Arnold's poem (which he quoted in *Desert Islands*), to portray man's lonely self 'in the sea of life enisled'.⁹⁷

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(7) THE PARADISAL GOAL: DISCUSSION OF 'THE CREATURES'

The many images in de la Mare's mythic pattern, detailed above, culminate in his imagined and longed-for Paradise, the goal of his traveller; the lost country of 'The Monologue'; the Eden from which man was banished and for which he longs; the Jerusalem 'mourned and desired in every human heart'.⁹⁸ It is glimpsed in varying detail in many of his poems, but it is in his story 'The Creatures' that we get the most complete and unified picture of its landscape. The story is a companion piece in prose to his poem, *The Traveller*. In it are combined 'literary' echoes (particularly of *Paradise Lost* and the Bible), and 'natural' images from a pastoral, though slightly etherealised English landscape.

The framework of the story, in typical de la Mare fashion, is that of a traveller between the four walls of a railway carriage in the ebbing light of evening, recounting to a fellow-passenger how once, in the course of a long walk through the beautiful English countryside, he had found tucked away in a peaceful valley his 'particular paradise'. He felt that there he had come 'back to the borders of Eden, bowed and out-wearied, gazing from out of dream into dream, homesick, "forsaken"'.

He had never 'forgotten that Eden's primeval trees and shade', which was in such contrast to the Waste Land type of landscape through which their train was then travelling: 'bare, thorned, black, January hedge, inhospitable salt coast, flat waste of northern water'. On that particular day, he said, he had come from the 'swarming wilderness' of London, on a quest 'for that unforeseen nowhere for which the heart, the fantasy aches'. It was in this dreamlike landscape that he had followed a faint track, and had come unexpectedly upon a farmhouse which, after the desecration of the 'cities of the plain' and their sickening crowds, had seemed like a haven, a dream house. As he approached the house he had heard a bodiless 'thin-drawn sweet, tuneless warbling', 'what seemed like the twangling of a harp'. He entered the cool, farmhouse kitchen, which was full of flowers and 'a twittering cloud of small birds' which 'fluttered up a few inches from floor and sill and window-seat'. He could hear 'the infinitesimal *tic-tac* of their tiny claws upon the slate'. ⁹⁹

This farmhouse was inhabited by a family called Creature. The master was dark, with slightly sinister, strange, grey-green eyes, and it seemed he had a kinship with animals and was able to converse with the birds in a strange language.¹⁰⁰ An old woman also lived there, and two ungainly dwarfish children called Maria and Christus — 'animal and angel appeared to have connived in their creation as if two races from the ends of the earth had in them intermingled their blood and strangeness'. ¹⁰¹ The man, apparently their father, a foreigner and pilgrim, had many years before wandered into the village and taken up residence in the farm, and their mother seemed to have been a 'woman fair as flax', who had 'come from the sea' in a blue gown, and had died and was buried in a far corner of the village graveyard, under a granite

slab, engraved with the name Femina Creature. The narrator had been fed in the kitchen on 'milk and bread, honey and fruit', and was then led into the garden by the two children:

Through a broad door they conducted me . . . into their garden. Garden! A full mile long, between undiscerned walls, it sloped and narrowed towards a sea at whose dark unfoamed blue, even at this distance, my eyes dazzled. Yet how can one call that a garden which reveals no ghost of a sign of human arrangement, of human slavery, of spade or hoe? 102

This is his Paradise on earth.

The story is slight. It is nothing but a description of how the traveller found this little Eden at the end of his journey, but it carries allegorical overtones. The lush surroundings of green valley and water; the twittering cloud of small birds and the garlands of wild flowers in the kitchen; the milk and fruit and honey which the traveller was offered;¹⁰³ the lovely, though untended garden; the names (Maria and Christus) of the children and their Oriental and animal aspect; the woman in blue called Femina; the significant name Creature; the kinship of the father with animals and birds; the mention of Eden and a country of dream; all these suggest that the Creature family is symbolic of the First Family in the Garden of Eden and that it might be possible for man to find something on earth akin to the Paradise of his hopes and dreams.¹⁰⁴ Although the landscape of the story recalls the Biblical story of the creation in Genesis, it is much richer in detail. This is the Eden of *Paradise Lost* or de la Mare's own Creation story, which both embellish with colour, scent and sound the sonorous, incantatory, rather impersonal narrative style of the Authorised Version. In Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis there is no description of the beauties of the Garden which the Lord God created for Adam; and of all the species of living things which He made, only the

whale is actually mentioned by name. In *Paradise Lost* and in de la Mare's own story of the Garden of Eden, on the other hand, the hills and valleys and crystal waters, the fragrant flowers, the animals and insects, and particularly the birds, are lovingly described. ¹⁰⁵

Indeed, many of the birds and insects are named by de la Mare — the grasshopper and butterfly, the swan, eagle, wren, goose, the little owl and the nightingale. Both Milton and de la Mare also present an imaginary picture of Eve. De la Mare wrote: 'She lay quiet as a stone, the gold of the sun mingling with the gold of her hair, her countenance calm and marvellous'.¹⁰⁶ This picture of Eve, mixed with the images of The Sleeping Beauty and of Ceres and the archetypal 'corn mother', is seen again in his poem 'Gold':

'Aloft, on that weed-hung turret, suns
Smote on her hair —
Of a gold by Archiac sought,
Of a gold sea-hid,
Of a gold that from core of quartz
No flame shall bid
Pour into light of the air
For God's Jews to see.'

(CP251)

Adam, too, in de la Mare's *Stories from the Bible*, is brought to life as a human being who has kinship with animals and is endowed with aesthetic senses:

Miraculous in grace and life and strength, his lighted eyes, his hair, his hands, the motion of his limbs, the mystery of his beating heart, his senses to touch and taste and smell and hear and see — miraculous also in the wonder of his mind that reflected in little all things of the great world around him — he too, like all else that had life in the Garden, had been fashioned and shaped of the dust. Yet was he in the image and likeness of the divine; the Lord God had breathed into him breath of life, and he became a living soul. (pp.4—5)

This conception of man is at the core of de la Mare's philosophy when he was at his most optimistic. He saw the whole of life and the wonder of man's body as a miracle which we should appreciate with every one of our senses. ¹⁰⁷

All in all 'The Creatures' is littered with clues which connect its theme with de la Mare's own *The Traveller* and his Creation story, with *Paradise Lost*, with Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and even with T. S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. The narrator of this story within a story seems to be a spokesman for de la Mare himself. He inveighs against 'Reason' and against man's arrogance:

Are not our desiccated jaded minds ever continually pressing and edging further and further away from freedom, the vast unknown, the infinite presence, picking a fool's journey from sensual fact to fact at the tail of that he-ass called Reason? I suggest that in that solitude the spirit within us realises that it treads the outskirts of a region long since called the Imagination.(p.277)

The narrator had set out to find his way by losing it. He is another image of Man lost in the world and trying to find an answer. He is like the rider in 'The Listeners', the knight in 'The Song of Finis' and *The Traveller*. He is like the Ancient Mariner and all the host of other travellers who belong to the Romantic school of literature.¹⁰⁸

The landscape of 'The Creatures' is a pastoral, 'natural' landscape, but the overtones are 'literary'. It is a country of light and beauty, like Traherne's:

A Globe more rich than Gold or precious Stone,
The fertile Ground of Pleasure and Delight,
Encircled in a Sphere of Light 109

like Vaughan's 'World of Light', like Shelley's 'white radiance of eternity' in *Adonais*.¹¹⁰ The garden which Maria and Christus showed the narrator is the magic garden of the Traveller's dream:

And in a garden played, serene, alone;
Bird, flower, water, shining in his eyes;
And magic hidd'n in even the tiniest stone ... 111

(CP506,vi)

Its Biblical nature is echoed in T. S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* and *Four*

Quartets. The rose-garden in 'Burnt Norton' is full of bird song and the laughter of children — 'Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened' (I.12):

Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.¹¹²
(I,19)

Eliot's rose-garden is the symbol of the moment when all times are together, a moment of contact with reality which we are always trying to recapture. In 'The Creatures', the traveller *is* able to pass through the 'broad door' into the Garden and make a brief contact with this 'reality':

"Never was actuality so close to dream. It was not only an unknown country, slipped in between these placid hills, on which I had chanced in my ramblings. I had entered for a few brief moments a strange region of consciousness. I was treading, thus accompanied, amid a world of welcoming and fearless life — oh, friendly to me! — the paths of man's imagination, the kingdom from which thought and curiosity, vexed scrutiny and lust — a lust it may be for nothing more impious than the actual — had prehistorically proved the insensate means of his banishment. 'Reality,' 'Consciousness': had he for 'the time being' unwittingly, unhappily missed his way? Would he be led back at length to that garden wherein cockatrice and basilisk bask, harmlessly, at peace?" (p.285).

This Garden, where Femina Creature, robed in blue, had once wandered, and where Maria and Christus played, is like the garden of *Ash Wednesday* where the 'Lady of silences', 'In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour', walked. She, too, like de la Mare's Vision, is an ambivalent figure — 'Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden' — a dream woman who is the symbol of salvation.¹¹³ With Eliot's Catholic background, she is probably to be identified with the Virgin and also, at the same time, with the Beatrice of Dante's *Purgatorio*, thus uniting the divine and the human, in much the same way

as de la Mare's Vision, while being the symbol of the Paradisal goal, seems to contain also something of the spiritual aspect of human love. This combination of images can be seen in his picture of Grisel, the woman whom Lawford loved in *The Return*:

He touched her hand, peering out of the shadows that seemed to him to be gathering between their faces. He drew her closer and touched her lips with his fingers. Her beauty seemed to his distorted senses to fill earth and sky. This, then, was the presence, the grave and lovely overshadowing dream whose surrender made life a torment, and death the nearer fold of an immortal, starry veil. She broke from him with a faint cry. And he found himself running and running, just as he had run that other night, with death instead of life for inspiration, towards his earthly home. (p.267)

To be reunited with this vision of Ideal Beauty and Love, this Eve with 'Eyes blue as chicory flower, and braided head',¹¹⁴ in the free, serene and lovely Edenic landscape which he sometimes glimpsed in childhood, is the symbolic goal of de la Mare's traveller.

CHAPTER 9

THEME AND TECHNIQUE

'How what is done is done is only a secondary though, intellectually, an arresting question.' *

(1) INTRODUCTION

In the foregoing chapters on Walter de la Mare's imagery, I stated my belief that critical analysis is not harmful to an appreciation of the poet's art; and I attempted to show that a close study of his imagery and a recognition of its holism could help to identify the pattern of his ideas and beliefs. In the same way, I am convinced that an analysis of an artist's technique — his manner as well as his matter — increases a person's capacity to enjoy, and enhances his appreciation of a work of art whether it be, for example, ballet, music or the visual arts. It is easy to believe this when dealing with such arts as these, and much easier than applying the same principle to the arts that use words. For words are part of our ordinary utilitarian life. They are used all the time for logical and practical purposes, and it is difficult for us to realise that the writer-artist can also use them to depict for us his values and thoughts, his joy in life, his imaginative aspirations and dreams, which he seems to feel in a more vivid way than most ordinary people. In fact, the linguistic structure of a poem can be as beautiful as the structures of music or architecture. It brings control, shape and harmony to the poet's thought and intensifies and clarifies the substance of the poem.

In this respect I am on the side of modern linguists who, like Winifred Nowottny for example, feel that examining the structure of

poetic language in critical terms sharpens our appreciation of 'the power residing in poetic configurations of words'. There is nowadays a rapprochement between linguists and literary critics in their belief that the sense of a piece of literary work is related to the technicalities of the medium, that 'the meaning and value in poems are the product of a whole array of elements of language'. De la Mare is one of those poets who 'in weighing words, are consciously as vigilant of the effects which may be produced by use of their corporeal characteristics as they are of their conceptual meanings'.¹

But the problem of talking about poetic language is great. Luce Bonnerot devotes Part IV of her thesis to a study of Walter de la Mare as Artist, saying however that another whole book would be necessary to treat this subject exhaustively. She describes him as 'un merveilleux virtuose' in the use of the English language but, because of the breadth of her thesis, this is perforce a rather generalised review, with particular attention being paid to de la Mare's mastery of all the variations of the stanza form. She does not include any extended analyses of particular poems.² I attempt this here, for I think that a pragmatic examination of the text is the only really satisfactory method of identifying the poet's special techniques and their effects on the reader. This chapter will, I hope, reveal something more of de la Mare's poetic genius than is immediately obvious, for I do not agree with John Press when he says that de la Mare's poetry does not lend itself to academic critical analysis.³

De la Mare himself had something to say on this subject. Imaginative writers do not usually have time to analyse their work, he wrote: 'Supreme creative work proceeds by an exquisite, though it may be un-registerable process of choice and rejection, a combining of parts, and

an intricate concatenation of the dissimilar and seemingly alien'. To find out how a thing is made, he said, especially 'un-human things', is usually sought in vain. Yet, he continued, 'there is a science — open and latent — in versemaking'.⁴ And, in a discussion on poetry with Spender and Desmond Hawkins, he said that 'what matters most is not so much what we say as how we say it. The rhythms of speech, the intonation, the cadences of the very voice itself reveal the impulse, the deeper meaning and the conviction of what we say'.⁵

It may be that the lack of an adequate body of academic criticism on what de la Mare said, and how he said it, has contributed towards the denial to him of his rightful place in English literature. That place, as I said previously, is as a master of the romantic lyric and an important poet in the romantic tradition of Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Christina Rossetti, Hardy, Yeats and, in more modern times, Edwin Muir and Dylan Thomas. Although he still has a small place in the anthologies, on the whole he seems to be remembered only by readers from the first half of this century who know and admire some of these anthology poems and his poetry for children, which they probably read as school-children.⁶ To the average student of today he appears to be almost unknown or, if known in an historical context, Leavis's description of him as 'the belated last poet of the Romantic tradition . . . already as remote as Poe from the present of poetry', still obscures his genius.⁷ Although some academic theses and papers on his short stories have appeared, little has been written recently about his poetry. Poems of his are quite often attributed to others; his Nonsense verse is hardly known compared with that of Lear and Carroll; and the extent and variety of his work is unacknowledged except by a few critics.⁸ It is probable that de la Mare has been

neglected because this century is the age of the sociologist and its literature is rather social-problem-orientated, while de la Mare shunned the didactic and moral aspect of literature and the Modernist mode, and his poetry shows little social or political awareness. He was interested instead primarily in the life of the mind. He has been considered, therefore, as a poet who had nothing to say to the modern world, whose poetry was old-fashioned and totally lacking in realism in the modern sense of the word.⁹

This is not a true picture of de la Mare's work which is, on the contrary, full of variety, and what he himself termed 'actualism'. Luce Bonnerot wrote: 'Or son œuvre est abondante, déconcertante par sa variété de tons, profonde et complexe, obscure souvent . . .'. She continued: 'A côté de la souriante bonté et de la compréhension s'exerce un esprit critique d'une cruelle acuité. Au total Walter de la Mare est le plus indépendant et le plus individualiste des poètes, tout enraciné qu'il soit dans la tradition'.¹⁰ De la Mare's dualism — the combination in his work of actualism and romance, of 'literary' and 'natural' images (as previously discussed), is matched by the diversity of his poetic technique.¹¹ This can, I believe, be illustrated by isolating a particular theme — that of the cat — and showing how he treated it in various ways, and how he adapted his technique to his subject and the atmosphere he wished to create. The cat has been chosen as a subject (rather arbitrarily perhaps), because de la Mare was extremely fond of cats and it is a favourite image of his and can be seen quite clearly to play a dual role in his poetry.¹² He invested it, at different times, with both its ordinary, earthy qualities, and also with a supernatural, mythic and literary quality, thus combining in one image his two worlds of reality and imagination.¹³

Poems may be primarily realistic, reflecting the life of the everyday world, or they may be fantastic with only a limited resemblance to that world, or they may mix realistic and fantastic. De la Mare's poems can, on the whole, be divided up between the two worlds of actuality and fantasy, the poems of actuality being very often those ostensibly for children. This duality of mode can be seen if his poems are arranged under certain headings so as to show his method of approach in each case. He may be seen as the poet of actuality; the poet of mystery, myth and fantasy; the poet of quiet, conversational meditation; the more serious, speculative, visionary poet; the children's poet; and the humorous poet. I cannot attempt a detailed study of his humorous or children's poetry here, except in so far as they impinge on his other types of poetry. His cat poems, however, can be divided up between the first three of these headings at least, and then used to show how de la Mare's poetic technique and mode of treatment altered as the occasion and his attitude to the theme altered. The analysis of three of his cat poems which this entails will be followed by some further analyses of poems already discussed in previous chapters. From this practical criticism I hope to reveal de la Mare's mastery of versification and the English language which has been somewhat masked, I believe, by the apparent ease and simplicity of his best poetry. ¹⁴

* * * * *

(2) THE MATCHING OF POETIC THEME AND TECHNIQUE: DISCUSSION OF THE CAT POEMS

De la Mare's love of animals is evident in all his work, and his particular penchant for cats may be deduced from the number of times he mentioned them in prose and poetry with interest and affection. Except

possibly for T. S. Eliot, who wrote fifteen cat poems, and Baudelaire, no other important poet appears to have written so much on the subject of cats.¹⁵ But de la Mare's cats are not at all like Eliot's. It is clear that Eliot's cats are really people in disguise and that he used them to satirise various human types:

You now have learned enough to see
That cats are much like you and me
And other people whom we find
Possessed of various types of mind. 16

Sometimes de la Mare indulged his animism — that 'natural and instinctive inclination in human minds and hearts to give life and consciousness and feeling to that which perhaps may have none'.¹⁷ Then he put human speech and ideas into the mouths of his cats, but he usually allowed them more of their own natural cattish character and pursuits. There is an illuminating fragment amongst the de la Mare papers, which shows how interested he was in them:

I couldn't mention how many cats I still revere. However, from an upper window there are many such creatures who little realise what a Friend they have up aloft — a black that spends most of the day in meditation, a pale ginger on a wall (ditto), a tabby, a marmalade, and a rather slinky black, possibly from Hollywood. 18

There are all sorts of stories, legends and snippets of information about cats in *Come Hither*. These include John Trevisa's description of the cat in 1387; information from the writings of the ancient Egyptians about their revered cats; the value of cats in Wales in the eleventh century; the story of the Cheshire Cat who may look at a king; and Dick Whittington's cat who was not a cat, but *acat* (meaning goods for trading — coals!)¹⁹ There are five cat poems in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, and nine cat stories in *Animal Stories*.²⁰ In the Introduction to *Come Hither*, Linnet Sara had a sleek tabby cat; in *Broomsticks and Other Tales*, the title story is devoted to Miss Chauncey's

witch-familiar cat, Sam; and, in *The Complete Poems*, there are at least thirteen poems which mention cats.²¹ Three of these, 'Five Eyes' (CP173), 'Maerchen' (CP251), and 'Comfort' (CP283), will serve to illustrate de la Mare's variety of mode and linguistic technique.

'Five Eyes' is a simple, descriptive but action-full poem about three working mill cats. These cats are very much part of an actual workaday world, and the poem shows de la Mare as (a) the poet of actuality.²² 'Maerchen', whose cat 'looked long and softly at the king' and is the central figure in a weird, dreamlike world, shows de la Mare in his best-known role as (b) the poet of mystery, myth and fantasy.²³ While 'Comfort' pictures a talking, philosophising cat with something of the mantle of humanity thrown over him, and shows de la Mare as (c) the poet of quiet, conversational meditation.²⁴

(a) The Poet of Actuality

FIVE EYES

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	In Hans' old Mill his three black cats	a
2	Watch his bins for the thieving rats.	a
3	Whisker and claw, they crouch in the night,	b
4	Their five eyes smouldering green and bright:	b
5	Squeaks from the flour sacks, squeaks from where	c
6	The cold wind stirs on the empty stair,	c
7	Squeaking and scampering, everywhere.	c
8	Then down they pounce, now in, now out,	d
9	At whisking tail, and sniffing snout;	d
10	While lean old Hans he snores away	e
11	Till peep of light at break of day;	e
12	Then up he climbs to his creaking mill,	f
13	Out come his cats all grey with meal —	f (imperfect)
14	Jekkel, and Jessup, and one-eyed Jill.	f

(CP173)

'Five Eyes' first appeared in *Peacock Pie* (1913) and was reprinted under the heading 'All Creatures Great and Small' in *Collected Rhymes and Verses* (1944). Both these collections were intended for children, but many of them appeal also to adults as Auden noted, when he wrote that while there are some good de la Mare poems only for adults, there are no good poems only for children.²⁵ But, of course, as de la Mare himself realised, not all children like poetry. It is false, as he said, to generalise about childhood. Children are born different and an unimaginative child (like an unimaginative adult) will probably not appreciate even de la Mare's best poems. But 'Five Eyes' will certainly satisfy most children's demand for definite images, and will please them with its jaunty rhythm and jolly noise. Adults too will probably appreciate the close and accurate observation of the poem, its cunning rhythms and manipulation of language. There is none of the dreamy fantasy and escape from life with which de la Mare is often reproached by the modernists. It is a quite simple description of the life of a miller's working cats. Through both the mind's eye and the physical ear the poet evokes the picture of an old mill at night, filled with greedy, squeaking, scampering rats intent on getting their fill of the grain stored there; while the miller's guardian cats lie in wait for them, ready to pounce and kill. They are his workers, fighting to save his stores.

A possible source for the title 'Five Eyes' may be found in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, in which de la Mare included poems entitled 'Four-Paws, and 'The Three Cats', the latter jingle perhaps providing him with the idea for the subject of mill cats:

As I was going o'er misty moor
I spied three cats at a mill-door;
One was white and one was black,
And one was like my granny's cat. (p.30)

In his note to 'Four-Paws', de la Mare described to his child readers such a half-wild, working farm cat: 'the prowling old grey mother farm cat who all her life has had to fend for herself and get her food where she can find it — a field mouse in the corn or a rat in the barn . . . *She* roves the stackyard and sleeps in the straw'. Her kitten however is a domesticated, hearth-sharing friend of man who has 'a snug home' (p.211). The mother cat is an independent creature like the crafty Siamese cat in 'Double Dutch' who:

. . . Sniffing through wild wood, sagely, silently goes,
Prick ears, lank legs, alertly twitching nose,
And on her secret errand reads with ease
A language no man knows. 26 (CP538)

But her kitten is a soft house cat like 'Puss' (CP268), who 'loves man's winter fire', or the tabby-cat in 'The Owl'

. . . that, fathom deep,
On the scoured counter lay asleep,
Reared up its head to yawn, and then,
Composing itself to sleep again,
With eyes by night made black as jet, . . . (CP330)

These two types of cat — domesticated and wild — in de la Mare's cat poems are drawn from real animals, and 'Five Eyes' is a good example of this actualism. It is in such a closely observed, descriptive poem as this that de la Mare's kinship with his contemporary Georgian poets can be seen. Many of them liked to write about the natural, rural world in the simple, direct way which they had inherited from Thomas Hardy and the English Romantic tradition. Compare, for instance, W. H. Davies's 'The Cat':

Within that porch, across the way,
I see two naked eyes this night;
Two eyes that neither shut nor blink,
Searching my face with a green light

or Edward Thomas's 'A Cat':

In Spring, nevertheless, this cat
Ate blackbirds, thrushes, nightingales,
And birds of bright voice and plume and flight, 27
As well as scraps from neighbours' pails.

There are readers who might call such poems prosaic and weak, and de la Mare wrote many a feeble poem himself, for example 'Puss' (CP268). Like 'Five Eyes', it is a simple verse for children, but it does not carry the same conviction. It contains the inversions which can so often jar upon the reader and are a feature of de la Mare's style, particularly in the early days. The neighbouring poem 'Seeds' (CP268) shows how unnecessary this inversion is. In 'Puss' it seems to be used to support the rhyme scheme, whereas 'Seeds' consists of two simple flowing, syntactically straightforward sentences, with rhymes which fall naturally and imperceptibly into place without recourse to inversion. One must, however, be wary in such criticism in view of what de la Mare said about 'trusting the poet' in *Come Hither*: 'But I did see this, that like a carpenter who makes a table, a man who has written a poem has written it like that *on purpose*' (p.xxix).

De la Mare was a very careful craftsman and took great trouble with the texture of his verse. He sought and sought for the exactly right word. 'Watch a kitten playing with a walnut or a ball of wool — that's how a poet tries to use words', he wrote in *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (p.211). Again, speaking on the radio, he said that a writer does not use words just for their dictionary meaning, 'but as a kind of music — a music, that like music itself, is a method of expressing the utmost all we can. This is true of all imaginative writing — this half-scored harmony and accord of words'.²⁸ That his verse appealed to musicians is shown by the fact that more than twenty

composers (from 1919 to 1970) have set poems of his to music.²⁹

Among the better known are Herbert Howells, Ivor Gurney, Benjamin Britten, Lennox Berkeley and Cecil Armstrong Gibbs, who set 'Five Eyes' to music in 1917. A good choral rendering of this serves to emphasize its strong rhythmic quality and shows how de la Mare's use of cacophony, alternating with euphonious diction, highlights the contrast between the tense, explosive action of the cats and the rats (lines 1—5 and 7—9), and the quiet, sleepy atmosphere of the lines depicting the old sleeping miller Hans (10—12).

A close examination of this poem (purposely very detailed because of its apparent simplicity), reveals how subtly de la Mare used words and linguistic devices 'as a kind of music' to paint a lively and colourful scene. 'Five Eyes' has no social or philosophical message, no imagery, no complexity, but by manipulation of syntax, metre, vocabulary and phonology, de la Mare has created a tiny vignette of life, framed in a unified and satisfying pattern of words.

Unity and tension, an essential part of any successful poem, are achieved firstly by the posing of a riddle in the title 'Five Eyes' (repeated again, line 4). This riddle remains in the mind like a question mark until it is elucidated in the final line by the appearance of a one-eyed cat. The pattern of expectation set up at the beginning is also well concluded rhythmically by the climactic, strongly-stressed last three monosyllables, 'one-eyed Jill'.³⁰ Secondly, tension is achieved and the whole poem unified, by the use of interlocking patterns of contrast in the structural, rhythmical and phonological arrangements.

The poem consists of fourteen lines of verse (iambic tetrameters), with four sets of rhyming couplets and the centre part and end of the poem marked by triplets. This structure provides the regular pattern on which de la Mare played his variations of stress placement, cesura position and acoustic techniques so as to produce differences in sound and tempo to match his contrasting semantic requirements. The main artistic impression given is of vitality and vibrant action. This is contrived with the aid of a number of different linguistic devices, one of them being the lively rhythm and racy alliteration which is similar to the jingle 'The Three Cats', already mentioned. Both these verses echo the old native alliterative strong-stress metre of the nursery rhyme which de la Mare loved. Compare for example:

This is the farmer sowing his corn,
That kept the cock that crowed in the morn,
That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
That married the man all tattered and torn,
That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn. 31

De la Mare wrote about such old rhymes in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*:

There are many kinds of rhymes in this book — mere jingles, game-rhymes, nursery rhymes and poems. Some are old, some are new. Some are rather roughly made, they jog and stumble when they ought to dance; others are among the most lovely and perfect things that have ever been made out of English words. But every one has its own kind of goodness, and gives its own kind of pleasure, and many of them I have loved since I was a child. (p.16)

A vigorous and sparkling tone like that of the nursery rhyme is given to 'Five Eyes' by similar end-stopping (e.g. lines 1—4), and also by the highly varied positions of the cesuras with strong hiatus (e.g. lines 3, 5, 7).

The energy thus given to the poem is reinforced by the pattern of contrast throughout. Structurally speaking, it is divided basically into two halves, the scene being set in lines 1 to 7, and reaching its

climax after the repeated triplet rhyme, 'where / stair / everywhere', and the decisive central stop in line 7. Lines 1 to 7 are also subdivided into distinct sections: lines 1 to 4, where the watching cats are depicted, and lines 5 to 7, which describe their enemies the rats. In contrast to the scene setting in lines 1 to 7 which is, as it were, an introductory Act I, vigorous action follows in Act II, i.e., lines 8 to 14, where the verse texture helps to give a vivid picture of the predatory cats pouncing upon the rats: 'Then down they pounce, now in, now out'.³²

In analysing these contrasting sections, one finds convincing evidence of de la Mare's mastery of technique; or, if it was unconscious, then his innate feeling for the possibilities of language. It is noticeable, for instance, that in lines 1 to 4 (the cat section), there are no words denoting sound; the cats wait motionless and silent in the dark. The effect of menacing silence is brought about by the use of the semantically significant and consonantly emphatic finite verbs 'watch' and 'crouch' chiming together; by the present participle 'smouldering', which has associations with a fire static but ready to burst into flame; and also by rhythmic, syntactic and acoustic means. For example, the idea of a tense, coiled-spring silence is accentuated by the use of trochaic substitution in lines 2 and 3 where, deviating from the expected weak/strong stress of the normal iambic foot (as in line 1), the words 'watch' and 'whisker' take the initial accent and thus help to add weight to the other similar semantically important words such as 'crouch', 'smouldering', 'green' and 'bright'. These words are all atmospherically significant.

Syntactically speaking, the feeling of watchful menace seems to be achieved also by making the cats (and later, the rats), bodiless.

Notice the deviant omission of the connective 'with' in the phrase 'whisker and claw' (line 3), and the fact that these nouns are singular instead of the more natural plural, and that there is no verb. Grammatically this phrase should be something like 'with whiskers and claws poised'. So the cats' whiskers and claws are, as it were, unattached to bodies and the 'five eyes' are bodiless too, and are emphasized by foregrounding the adjectives 'green and bright' in a strong position at the end of line 4.³³ Language is being exploited here by de la Mare to suggest a sense of fear and mystery, of some unseen entity in the dark. The use of finite verbs and concrete nouns would probably have made the scene more real and down-to-earth, as it becomes in the second half of the poem. By contrast to the cat section, the rat section (lines 5 to 7) consists of words associated with sound rather than sight, for example, 'scampering' and 'squeaking'. Later, the rats (like the cats) are described deviantly simply by 'whisking tail, and sniffing snout' (line 9). They are not animals but sounds. Again, this lack of concrete actuality, the reification of the thing heard by the use of the present participle 'squeaking' and 'scampering', tends to enhance the atmosphere of mysterious and unseen movement.

There is acoustic contrast too in the poem. At the beginning, an effect of exuberant activity is achieved by the use of jostling and plosive consonants and sibilants. Later, the strong pauses marked by commas, the staccato monosyllables and the heavy stresses produce an effect of moving bodies, now leaping, now landing. The lively action in line 13 is accentuated by the trochaic inversion which flings the emphasis on 'Out', and by the climactic pause after 'meal'. In the final line this effect is increased by the repetition of 'and', the

alliteration and the unusual names of the cats.

All this busy activity is in strong contrast to the two quiet lines: 'The cold wind stirs on the empty stair' (6) and 'While lean old Hans he snores away' (10), and also to the slow, ponderous 'Then up he climbs to his creaking mill' (12). Lines 6 and 10 are made up of long, slow monosyllables and a slow rhythm which produce a totally different atmosphere. Line 6 gives a hint of that other side of de la Mare — the mysterious and magic world of 'The Listeners' with its 'dark stair, / that goes down to the empty hall', and other similar poems which describe a world far removed from the bustle of the farm.³⁴ Line 10 is a marvellous acoustic reproduction of the old, sleeping Hans.³⁵ De la Mare's use here of a syntactically straightforward sentence with no linguistic deviations to describe Hans, also seems to give him solidity and reality in comparison to the disembodied animals. In line 12 the 'k' alliteration is, perhaps, associated in our minds not only with the creakiness of the old mill stair, but also with Hans's old and probably rheumatically limbs. Again, the cacophony of the line may create the effect of slow, heavy, difficult movements.

'Five Eyes' is not a poem to please those who think complexity is a sign of true poetry; or that use of imagery, depth of thought and philosophy, or some sort of social awareness and social message are signs of poetry. It might be thought on the one hand to be just a childish jingle or, on the other hand, to be merely a technically brilliant piece of scene painting. It is these things. But, at the same time, it shows a place of work in the world and man's enemies the marauding rats, the defending cats and their human master. It is a poem of actuality — a microcosm of everyday life, which de la Mare is so often accused of ignoring. It seems simple but, on analysis, it is

apparent that the linguistic technique which de la Mare brought to bear on it was anything but unstudied.

(b) The Poet of Mystery, Myth and Fantasy

MAERCHEN

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	Soundless the moth-flit, crisp the death-watch tick;	a
2	Crazed in her shaken arbour bird did sing;	b
3	Slow wreathed the grease adown from soot-clogged wick:	a
4	The Cat looked long and softly at the King.	b
5	Mouse frisked and scampered, leapt, gnawed, squeaked;	a
6	Small at the window looped cowed bat a-wing;	b
7	The dim-lit rafters with the night-mist reeked:	a
8	The Cat looked long and softly at the King.	b
9	O wondrous robe enstarred, in night dyed deep:	a
10	O air scarce-stirred with the Court's far junketing:	b
11	O stagnant Royalty — A-swoon? Asleep?	a
12	The Cat looked long and softly at the King.	b

(CP251)

'Maerchen' is a total contrast to the lively, active, staccato atmosphere of 'Five Eyes', and I place it in juxtaposition to 'Five Eyes' to emphasize that contrast in theme and treatment. It appeared in *The Veil* (1921), and shows de la Mare as the highly imaginative poet of dream and fantasy. This is the strange ambiguous poet whom Victoria Sackville-West described as 'the poet of terror' in whose poems 'more tigers than kittens prowl across our path'.³⁶ The cat here is not a working nor a domestic cat, but the cat of fable and fairy-tale, a mysterious creature of the night whose companions are the bat, the moth and the mouse. This is the witch-cat of myth.³⁷

He is motionless; the mice scamper undisturbed around him. The whole impression of the poem is of languour, decay and death in a dream-like atmosphere. The same haunted and desolate landscape is repeated in other poems, for example in 'Outer Darkness':

. . . Fret-moth and mouse
Had forsaken for ever this house.
As I moved through the room I was frosted with light;
Decay was here Regent of Night.
It clotted the fabric of curtain and chair
Like a luminous mildew infesting the air;
An æon had waned since there fell the faint call
Of the last mateless insect at knock in the wall. 38

(CP492—94,iv)

Death is evoked by the death watch tick in line 1 of 'Maerchen', where there is a double association with the passing of time and the death-watch beetle ravaging the house of life. Line 10, 'the Court's far junketing' echoes perhaps the 'Dust and ashes!' of Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's'(xv), where the Venetian court ladies in just such a setting of decay, are dancing towards death. 39

In *Animal Stories* de la Mare remarked that the German word 'Maerchen' means a fairy tale, possibly with a moral (p.xxvii). So we may accept the idea that there is probably a connection here with the fairy tale 'The Sleeping Beauty', with its sleeping Princess, King, Queen and Court and its enchanted and overgrown grounds — one of de la Mare's favourite images. 40 The refrain, 'The Cat looked long and softly at the King', is based on the old proverb, 'A Cat may look at a King', which is used by Lewis Carroll's Alice, and is also echoed by de la Mare later in *Winged Chariot*: 'Gazing meanwhile intently at the King....' (CP593,v). 41 Like Alice's Wonderland, this is a topsy-turvy world. Nature has taken over from man, as the forest took over the Sleeping Beauty's palace, as night takes over from day.

For de la Mare night is often synonymous with death and sleep, while day is life, as is seen in his epitaph:

O passer-by, beware!
Is the day fair? —
Yet unto evening shall the day spin on
And soon thy sun be gone;
Then darkness come,
And this, a narrow home.
Not that I bid thee fear:
Only, when thou at last lie here,
Bethink thee, there shall surely be
Thy Self for company. 42 (CP759)

Luce Bonnerot calls 'Maerchen' an astonishing evocation of the physical reality of the night — night which transforms everything ordinary, when the power of the eye decreases, but the power of the imagination increases. She offers the explanation that the cat, citizen of the shadows, friend of the supernatural powers, is at his ease at night, but the Man-King is displaced, a stranger there. Does he sleep, or is he in a state of non-being? The cat queries the presence of man in this night world. 43

It is certainly difficult to state the overt meaning of the poem, which is permeated by associative effects which can be interpreted differently by each reader. This is one of the chief differences between 'Maerchen', 'Five Eyes' and 'Comfort' (the meaning of the two latter poems being quite clear), and is typical of the ambiguous and mysterious side of de la Mare's poetry. Yeats and Mallarmé thought that veiled meaning was the only valid distinction between poetry and prose, and Arthur Symons said that 'to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create'. 44 So, a poem like 'Maerchen' forms a bridge between de la Mare's simple, realistic poems and a whole range of meditative poems about the mystery of life and death. It hovers between the philosophical depths of such subjects and the fairy-tale land of the

riddle and the allegory. And, just as the material of this poem differs widely from 'Five Eyes' and 'Comfort', so does its linguistic technique.

The vocabulary of the poem is not complicated, but the simple words used (for example in the refrain), are iced elsewhere with an archaic poetic diction ('arbour', 'adown', 'a-wing', 'enstarred', 'a-swoon') which, by its very contrast to the simple, Anglo-Saxon type of words ('frisked', 'scampered', 'leapt', 'gnawed'), gives an impression of romantic mystery and dream. This is increased by the ballad-type refrain, the incantatory effect of the 'O' in lines 9 to 11, and the de la Mare trick of inversion in lines 1 to 3 and 5 to 6, which throws strong stress on such long-drawn-out, evocative words as 'soundless', 'slow' and 'crazed', which have semantic and acoustic associations with sleep. The enchanted, spell-bound atmosphere is further intensified by the langourous rhythm and onomatopoeic internal assonance of a line like 'Slow wreathed the grease adown from soot-clogged wick' (line 3), which is quite different from the staccato effect of the rat and cat movements in 'Five Eyes'. The intricate, intertwining and unifying rhyme scheme of the stanzas (abab), with the rhymes of the first stanza repeated in the other two stanzas in true or in half rhyme or assonantal rhyme, also, with the use of alliteration, gives a romantic, Spenserian touch to the poem.

Some critics think that in many of his poems, of which this is an example, de la Mare overdid the use of musical verse texture and poetic diction. Sometimes this criticism is justified in the same way that *Henry Brocken* is an example of over-ornamented prose. De la Mare, however, thought that poetry should have some affinity with music and,

in a poem like this, which depends for its effect on an atmosphere of mystery and ambiguity, one might think that such full use of all the resources of language is indispensable to its success. He himself wrote that 'the mere saying of the name of a thing, the very sound of it, may more than satisfy both ear and eye. It is an incantation, and, like the thing itself, a sesame to memories beyond the exquisite immediacy of perception and recognition attained through our senses'. ⁴⁵

(c) The Poet of Quiet, Conversational Meditation

Line	<u>COMFORT</u>	<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	As I mused by the hearthside,	a
2	Puss said to me:	b
3	'There burns the Fire, man,	c
4	And here sit we.	b
5	'Four Walls around us	a
6	Against the cold air;	b
7	And the latchet drawn close	c
8	To the draughty Stair.	b
9	'A Roof o'er our heads	a
10	Star-proof, moon immune,	b
11	And a wind in the chimney	c
12	To wail us a tune.	b
13	'What Felicity!' miaowed he,	a
14	'Where none may intrude;	b
15	Just Man and Beast — met	c
16	In this Solitude!	b
17	'Dear God, what security,	a
18	Comfort and bliss!	b
19	And to think, too, what ages	c
20	Have brought us to this!	b
21	'You in your sheep's-wool coat,	a
22	Buttons of bone,	b
23	And me in my fur-about	c
24	On the warm hearthstone.'	b

(CP283)

'Comfort' first appeared in *The Fleeting* (1933) so, although it was reprinted in *Collected Rhymes and Verses* for children in 1944, it

is not specifically a poem for children. Beneath its surface simplicity there are more adult concepts, as E. V. Knox noted: 'Could anyone else have put the ridiculous history of human civilisation into so few, and so simple words?'⁴⁶ Indeed, we can contemplate in this little poem the historical story of man's progress from the cave to the civilisation of the house, his domestication of animals and his friendship with them. In the last stanza man's basic kinship to animals is emphasized by his 'sheep's-wool coat' and 'Buttons of bone'. There is a hint, too, that this speaking, philosophical and historically aware cat has come in from the dark, aloof world of nature and joined man in his house, thus forming a special relationship with him. He is not a working cat, but a companion to man.

Although, like 'Five Eyes' and 'Maerchen', this poem is about man and cat, de la Mare has again treated it technically quite differently. It consists of six four-lined stanzas, each line having two strong stresses, and the rhyme scheme is of the ballad type (abcb). Like 'Five Eyes', it is divided into sections. Stanzas 1 to 3 set the scene, being a description of the cosy house with its warm fire; while stanzas 4 to 6 contain the cat's philosophizing speech. The whole is rounded off by the repetition in the final stanza of the idea of the fire — 'hearthside' (line 1) and 'hearthstone' (line 24). The artistic impression this time, however, is not of vibrant action as in 'Five Eyes', nor of languour and mystery as in 'Maerchen', but of quiet meditation. The sense of intimacy and the simple, conversational, contemplative effect is achieved by choice and manipulation of rhythm, phonology, syntax and diction.

The basic rhythmic framework is an anapaestic metre, seen in lines 1, 7, 11 and 19, but there are wide deviations from this. Although each line has two strong stresses, there is (as in the typical colloquial ballad) a great variation in the number and position of unstressed syllables, these ranging from four to seven. This rhythmic variance gives an effect of natural speech. The conversational impression is enhanced by the simple, homely, monosyllabic vocabulary and the falling, casual rhythm of the feminine endings at the 'a' and 'c' rhymes, and the natural, tonic dropping of the voice on the 'b' rhymes. The varying positions of the cesura, the enjambements and the frequent commas, colons and exclamation marks add to this effect — as does the use throughout of many personal pronouns. The idea of a cat's speech is suggested by the sibilant 's' sounds, which one associates with the hissing of a cat ('Puss', 'bliss', 'burns', 'mused' etc.) and, in the last line, the delightful and unusual neologism 'fur-about', which chimes in the mind with another cat sound, 'purr'.⁴⁷

The quiet, warm, comfortable atmosphere is accentuated by the use of euphonious sounds, as for example the soft dental fricatives, nasals and liquids of stanza 3, with its internal rhyme and assonance. The house is described by homely, Anglo-Saxon-derived concrete nouns, emphasized by capital letters ('Walls', 'Stair', 'Roof', and 'Fire') which add to the solidity and warmth — the house standing four-square against the other world of the dark night outside, with its cold stars and moon. Note how the image of the cold stair in line 6 of 'Five Eyes' reappears here in line 8, 'the draughty stair', and how the contrast makes the fire-lit room inside appear warmer and more comfortable.

Also by contrast the moon 'can intensify darkness; give magic to the bewitched; terror to vacancy; horror to the haunted; an edge to the spectral. Her presence in sky or room deepens solitude; prepares for the ghostly'.⁴⁸

Consideration might be given, too, to the effect of the opposition of the single archaism 'latchet' (line 7) to the generally simple and concrete diction of this poem. The word 'wicket' in a neighbouring poem, 'The Bottle' echoes it perhaps in an associative way:

Wicket out into the dark
That swings but one way;
Infinite hush in an ocean of silence
Aeons away —
Thou forsaken! — even thou! —
The dread good-bye;
The abandoned, the thronged, the watched,
the unshared —
Awaiting me — I! 49 (CP288—89,vii)

Both evoke the idea of that other world of mystery and death which lies awaiting us outside the house of life.

This archaic noun 'latchet' has another effect. In many minds it probably has associations with the castles, turrets and gates of fairy tale and romance. De la Mare, as already noted, loved ballad, fairy story, folk tale, nursery rhyme and proverb and used them a great deal in his poetry. One might feel, therefore, that the talking cat in 'Comfort' has affinities with Puss in Boots, Dick Whittington, Carroll's Cheshire cat, and de la Mare's own cat of fable in *Winged Chariot*. Just as the image of the stair connects 'Comfort' with 'Five Eyes', so this image of the unreal, fairy-tale cat connects it with 'Maerchen'.

'Comfort', however, is a very different poem from either 'Maerchen' or 'Five Eyes'. Its cat appears in a simple, everyday setting, but it

is not a simple, everyday cat. It is neither a real working cat like the mill cats in 'Five Eyes', nor is it an altogether fantastic cat, owing something to myth and fairy tale, like the cat in 'Maerchen'. Indeed, it seems quite a modern cat. Significantly, 'Comfort' was printed in *The Fleeting* immediately after another poem in colloquial form, 'The Feckless Dinner-Party', whose diction and dialogue give it a modernist tone a little reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Compare, for instance, de la Mare's

'Dinner is served!' '"Dinner is served!"'
'Is served?' 'Is served.' 'Ah, yes.' (CP281—82,ii)

and Eliot's

And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot —
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta Ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.
(II,167—72)

The utter simplicity of 'Comfort', and what seems its inevitable form, hides a masterly use of poetic technique and diction. The technique can certainly be analysed and is, of course, extremely important; Mallarmé stressed that a poem is not made from feelings but from words. But still, as de la Mare showed that he knew, form and technique are not all. While he does seem to have had an unusual ability in the choice and positioning of words, and most of his best poems have the brevity of expression and economy of meaning which are necessary to the lyric mode,⁵⁰ he also had the genuine inspiration and special unanalysable quality which vibrates in the mind and is the mark of the true poet. As he said: 'The creative impulse, the visiting spirit, is essential'.⁵¹ And, again, he wrote:

In the greatest writers analysis attempts in vain to discover the process that has transformed experience into literature. Poetry is the sudden blossoming, after long and hidden growth, of roots deep in earth and boughs in heaven. Genius advances from intuition to intuition with an absorption untroubled and unperplexed by inessentials, and compels life to its own ends. Talent sits before its model and takes infinite pains over what genius may not even have consciously ignored. 52

It may seem strange to use such a simple little poem (unusual as it is) to illustrate de la Mare's lyric genius, but we are generally content to agree that good poetry does not necessarily have to take a lofty and complicated form. Burns, for example, is acclaimed for his simple lyrics as much as Donne for his difficult ones. Of the three illustrative poems quoted here, 'Comfort' is, I think, the most successful and yet, strangely enough (like 'The Feckless Dinner-Party' perhaps), it is probably the one least likely to be ascribed to de la Mare by an average reader. It illustrates well his diversity as a poet. It is modern in its easy, conversational mode, yet timeless and traditional in form. There is an unique air of humour and adventure; yet, even in its fantasy, he is not out of touch with human nature. And all this is framed in a well-matched linguistic

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pattern. It is my belief that there are something like one hundred lyrics in de la Mare's *Complete Poems* which are of this order of excellence — surely a considerable achievement. Often slight in theme, they have the delicacy of form of a spider's web and contain the unforced inspiration of genuine art.

* * * * *

(3) HIS LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUE: ANALYSES OF SEVEN POEMS

In earlier chapters I have discussed in some detail individual poems by de la Mare which illustrated aspects of his thought and art ('The Ghost' and 'Echo'); and his imagery ('The Song of Finis', 'The

Railway Junction', 'The Cage', 'The Monologue' and 'The Vision').

I should now like to examine these seven poems further in order to illustrate de la Mare's linguistic technique and his ability to use all the many features of language to increase both the semantic content and the atmosphere of his poems.

(a) 'The Ghost'

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	'Who knocks?' 'I, who was beautiful,	a
2	Beyond all dreams to restore,	b
3	I, from the roots of the dark thorn am hither	c
4	And knock on the door.'	b
5	'Who speaks?' 'I — once was my speech	a
6	Sweet as the bird's on the air,	b
7	When echolurks by the waters to heed;	c
8	'Tis I speak thee fair.'	b
9	'Dark is the hour!' 'Ay, and cold.'	a
10	'Lone is my house.' 'Ah, but mine?'	b
11	'Sight, touch, lips, eyes yearned in vain.'	c
12	'Long dead these to thine...'	b
13	Silence. Still faint on the porch	a
14	Brake the flames of the stars.	b
15	In gloom groped a hope-wearied hand	c
16	Over keys, bolts, and bars.	b
17	A face peered. All the grey night	a
18	In chaos of vacancy shone;	b
19	Nought but vast sorrow was there —	c
20	The sweet cheat gone.	b

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(CP196—97)

'The Ghost' is an example of the best of de la Mare's love poetry, and it is also a good illustration of his metrical genius. ⁵⁵ As in all his poems, his mastery of the phonological aspect of language — vowel music, alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme — is apparent here, and very effective; but it is the rhythm and structure of 'The Ghost' which seem to be the most potent allies in the creation of its desolate and haunting atmosphere.

Like 'The Listeners', which has been the subject of much metrical analysis, 'The Ghost' is interesting from the metrical point of view.⁵⁶ In this poem, as in many others, one can see how de la Mare's handling of metre and his organisation of the larger movement of rhythms, show him to be — though still a Victorian — yet also a poet of the twentieth century. He is in line with another Victorian, Gerard Manley Hopkins and his experiments with 'sprung rhythm', who was before his time in moving away from a strict prosody.⁵⁷ Neither felt there was any merit in forcing rhythm into metrically correct iambs, trochees, spondees, anapaests and dactyls, and they both found a new freedom in handling the recurrent beat. De la Mare certainly took liberties with metre. For him, the number of syllables in a line was of secondary importance. He put the emphasis on cadence and stress rather than a rigid adherence to traditional feet. On the other hand, he had no sympathy with free verse. He certainly wanted liberty, but liberty within rules. In verse, said de la Mare, 'the subtlest art consists in revealing the widest freedom within certain accepted restrictions — those of metre'.⁵⁸ His poems have a basic metrical pattern, are usually in stanzaic form and are nearly always rhymed. Like Coleridge he felt that rhythm is order and gives a sense of control, that it tempers and restrains the passions. Coleridge said of metre that its origin could be traced to 'the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion'.⁵⁹ De la Mare explained his ideas about metre in *Poetry in Prose*. He called the longs and shorts of verbal scansion 'those elusive and protean phantom entities':

The terms long and short resemble empty boxes, then. *La* is only one of countless kinds and qualities of sound and vocal exercise which we can, so to speak, pack into these boxes. For now we are concerned with words. That being so, not only temporal duration, energy, pitch come into play but volume, timbre, quality, vocal patterning. Verbal sounds uttered by the voice and/or listened to by the ear may in effect be light, heavy, flat, sharp, acute, voluminous, massive, dull, ringing, dark, luminous, brilliant, coloured — and much else. And every such sound, as in those of an orchestra, is in some degree influenced by its near and remoter neighbours. 60

For de la Mare these 'empty boxes' were elastic-sided.⁶¹ If there is an especially heavy stress on the stressed syllables, then it is easier to slur and hurry over the intervening syllables, so that one box may contain only one heavily stressed word or syllable and, perhaps, a significant pause, while the next-door box might contain many lightly stressed syllables in compensation, and probably no pause. Thus, in 'The Ghost', the question and answer in the dialogue between the grief-burdened, human lover and the invisible phantom are differentiated by metrical means, and the rhythmic pattern is used to throw accents on particular words so as to suggest the inflections of the speaking voice. So, in stanzas i and ii, firstly the human voice delivers two monosyllabic, heavily accented questioning words: 'Who knocks?' and 'Who speaks?'. Then, after a strong and significant cesura — a pregnant, waiting silence — comes the ghostly reply, with the heavily stressed monosyllabic 'I', followed by a long, almost pauseless, very lightly accented sentence which continues throughout the rest of the stanza. These two sentences in stanzas i and ii can be spoken quickly, the metrical accents being slurred over to give the effect of a light, airy, ghostly voice, 'sweet as the bird's on the air'. The ear seems to detect a regular metre, but every stanza differs in metrical and syllabic pattern, being made up of various arrangements of 3. 4. and 2. stress lines. The syllabic pattern of the poem

shows how de la Mare packed his boxes in different ways:

Stanza	i:	8.7.11.5.
Stanza	ii:	7.7.10.5.
Stanza	iii:	7.7. 7.5.
Stanza	iv:	7.6. 8.6.
Stanza	v:	7.8. 7.4.

The structure of the poem, in contrast to this rhythmical irregularity, is completely formal. There is a satisfying symmetry and balance achieved by the exact syntactical patterning of the dialogue in stanzas i, ii, and iii, rounded off by the narrative form in stanzas iv and v, and the lexical repetition within the dialogue:

'Who knocks?' . . . 'I . . . knock' (stanza i)

'Who speaks?' . . . 'I speak . . . ' (stanza ii)

The tension involved in the struggle between the various irregularities of rhythm superimposed on the apparent underlying metrical pattern, and the formal syntactical structure, gives the poem an energy, excitement and suspense in keeping with its ghost story atmosphere.

As Coleridge wrote about the 'Origin and Elements of Metre:

It tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable in their aggregate of influence. 62

Rhythm plays its part in the structure of the poem too. It divides off the two sections — the colloquial and the narrative. The narrative section (iv, v) has a more regular stress pattern than the colloquial section (i—iii), with its varied speech inflection effect. Yet the two parts are unified by the similar heavily accented opening phrases of each stanza, followed by the strong cesura. 'Silence' and 'A face peered' (lines 13,17) match the 'Who knocks?', 'Who speaks?' and 'Dark is the hour' (lines 1,5,9). The heavy stress and

long pause on the word 'Silence' at the apical point of the poem, where the two sections join, is extremely dramatic. So too is the cumulative effect of finality achieved by the build-up through the falling, basically two-stress rhythm of all the fourth lines to that climactic and bitter finale, 'The sweet cheat gone', with its bitten off consonants and internal rhyme.

Why does this poem affect us more than the same idea in prose? I suggest that in these five simple quatrains de la Mare achieved the subtle effect of haunting sorrow, not only by his use of significant form and rhythm, but also by vowel music. In this case it is the wailing note of the repeated falling diphthong 'ai': 'I', 'I' (stanza i); 'I', 'my', 'I' (ii); building to a crescendo with 'ay', 'my', 'my', 'mine', 'sight', 'eyes', 'thine' (iii), then falling again with 'silence' (iv) and 'night' (v). This sound is undoubtedly associated in the reader's mind phonetically and semantically with the grieving verbs 'cry' and 'sigh'.

'The Ghost' contains many of the characteristics of the ballad form. Within the structure of the four-line stanzas, rhyming abcb, there is the hint of a dramatic episode in simple, condensed form, using dialogue and narrative. The adjectives are conventional (beautiful, sweet, dark, cold, lone, grey), there are archaisms, and de la Mare used very effectively the common balladic device of incremental repetition. The poem is a tiny lyric version of one of de la Mare's own ghost stories such as, for example, 'An Anniversary'.⁶³ This story is also about a revenant who, in the star-lit dusk, comes knocking at the door of a house with a porch, and it is, like the poem, the tale of a lost love.⁶⁴

The poem conforms to de la Mare's own rules for a successful ghost story. 'Every word, every cadence, every metaphor' is, he said, 'apt to the matter in hand'.⁶⁵ He maintained that the scene must be in ordinary life and have an air of reality. 'The Ghost' has indeed a precise and tangible setting; there is a house with a porch, a door to be knocked upon furnished with solid 'keys, bolts and bars'. 'When the story is at its proper dusk' de la Mare wrote, 'precisely the right kind of characters must be in alarmed or stealthy movement on the stage. They should be tinged with the queer, the erratic, or somehow rarefied'; and 'the reader's imagination . . . must be furtively quickened by a series of almost imperceptible hints, decoys, innuendoes, into a peculiar sensitiveness'.⁶⁶ Thus, in 'The Ghost', the lover and the revenant are only vaguely hinted at. We know of the ghost only that it was once sweet-voiced and beautiful; of the lover we see only 'a hope-wearied hand' and a peering face. Subtle hints and innuendoes come in the phrases 'from the roots of the dark thorn'; 'the flames of the stars'; 'the bird's on the air', and 'In chaos of vacancy'. The dark thorn may suggest the dead and their ghostly spirits, because of the thorn tree's archetypal connection with tree-worship and the idea that the souls of the dead may animate trees; or that the hawthorn and may-tree protect man from the returning ghosts of the dead.⁶⁷ The bird also has a connection with the spirit world because, in myth and legend, it was often believed that the soul could be found in the body of a bird.⁶⁸ As to the stars, the very contrast between the warmth inherent in the word 'flames', and the universal conception of the distant frigidity of the stars subtly emphasizes the mystery and chill of the scene. Finally, 'chaos of vacancy' is a 'decoy' phrase of tremendous potentiality. There is an amorphous vagueness about it which, linked and balanced lexically,

phonologically and positionally exactly with the phrase 'vast sorrow' in the next line (19), seems to open up an immense emotional abyss of grief. One may recall de la Mare's comment in *Love*, where he quoted Othello's words 'chaos is come again', and added that 'that "chaos" is not a word but a conjuration' (p.xlv). So it is in his own poem.

The 'queer' and 'the erratic' are there in the archaic words. They do not jump at once to the eye, so much do they seem to belong to the fabric of the poem ('hither' (i); 'thee', ''tis', 'heed', 'fair' (ii); 'Ay', 'lone', and 'thine' (iii); 'brake' (iv); and 'nought' (v)). But they contrast with the simplicity of the syntax and the other words employed, and with the rigorous narrowing-down overall which focusses the attention and is responsible for the intensity of the poem.⁶⁹ These archaic words carry with them a sense of another world, for most of them are spoken by the ghost. That mysterious atmosphere is carried over from the dialogue to the narrative section by the two archaisms used there — 'brake' and 'nought' (lines 14, 19). 'Brake' has an almost unanalysable quality and carries overtones from the 'dark thorn' in stanza i; for brake can also mean a cluster of trees.⁷⁰ 'Broke' would shatter the spell too soon before the final conjuration of the last stanza. 'Nought but' (line 19), with its strong plosives 't' and 'b', and its heavy stress, has tremendous semantic, phonetic and rhythmic force. Change that line to 'Nothing but vast sorrow was there', and a wide emotive resonance is probably lost.

The dramatic setting of this little love lyric 'The Ghost', shows that de la Mare's lyrical poetry is not just a romantic mouthing of vague, sweet nothings, nor is it only a skilful opiate offered by an insidiously enchanting magician, as some say. On the contrary, he can

present a concrete setting with great concision and attention to detail, and cloak the emotion (as Hardy so often does) in dramatic dialogue, as here, or in monologue as, for example, in 'The Monologue'. In a review of Ralph Hodgson's poems, de la Mare wrote:

There is a poetry in which the words themselves have almost the force and efficacy of deeds. They seem to have been fused into their places by the intensity of thought and feeling of which they are the expression. There is no violence, no over-emphasis, for these are symptoms of a dissipation of energy. The man in earnest never wastes. His speech is as clean and incisive as a blow. 71

And so it is with 'The Ghost'.

(b) 'Echo'

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	'Who called?' I said, and the words	a
2	Through the whispering glades,	b
3	Hither, thither, baffled the birds —	a
4	'Who called? Who called?'	c
5	The leafy boughs on high	a
6	Hissed in the sun;	b
7	The dark air carried my cry	a
8	Faintly on:	c
9	Eyes in the green, in the shade,	a
10	In the motionless brake,	b
11	Voices that said what I said,	a (imperfect)
12	For mockery's sake:	b
13	'Who cares?' I bawled through my tears;	a
14	The wind fell low:	b
15	In the silence, 'Who cares? Who cares?'	a
16	Wailed to and fro.	b

(CP94)

'Echo' (from *Poems*, 1906), with its echoing dialogue, its inhuman voices calling from the dark loneliness of the forest, and its peer-
ing, bodiless eyes, is a similar type of poem to 'The Ghost'. 72 It
is, perhaps, also a fore-telling of 'The Listeners' in the 1912 collec-
tion, where 'a host of phantom listeners' hearkened to the 'lonely
Traveller's call'. Both poems show an astonishingly successful fusing
of the romantic-archaic 'poetic' style and the ballad technique, with
its concision, its simple diction combined with archaisms, its dialogue

and echoing repetition. What can one say about a poet who, in 'Echo', combines the banality of stock poetic phrases like 'whispering glades', 'leafy boughs' and 'The wind fell low' and an archaism like 'brake' with the shock of unexpected verbs like 'hissed' and 'bawled', and carries it off successfully.⁷³ There is not a single simile or metaphor and only four adjectives (all conventional), yet the texture of the poem is rich in expressive and seemingly uncontrived alliteration and subtle internal assonance.⁷⁴ Indeed, the acoustic properties of the poem are an essential part of the scene painting. The echoing cries in stanzas i and iv are formed of the plosive consonant 'k' which, combined with the plosive verb 'bawled', simulates perhaps a clear, sharp calling voice. Similarly, the description of the sinister forest in stanzas ii and iii is full of sibilant 's' sounds ('Hissed in the sun' (ii)), which are repeated elsewhere, giving evil, snake-in-the-grass connotations.

Although in analysis scientific precision is impossible, much depending on subjective reactions (as above), the success of this poem seems, again, to consist in the strict economy of selection which focusses the attention, and in the tension brought about by several factors. For example, the posing and answering of questions; and the contrasts in its formal organisation, in its diction and its acoustic properties.⁷⁵ The metrics (which have something in common with 'The Listeners') also seem to have much to do with the creation of the atmosphere required. The strong three and two-stressed lines, with their arbitrary arrangement of weak and medium-weak syllables in between the stresses, tends to give an impression of wavering, echoing voices, and this is increased by the use of true and half-rhyme and internal rhyme, with its effect of mocking mimicry (line 3).

(c) 'The Song of Finis'

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	At the edge of All the Ages	a
2	A Knight sate on his steed,	b
3	His armour red and thin with rust	c
4	His soul from sorrow freed;	b
5	And he lifted up his visor	d
6	From a face of skin and bone,	e
7	And his horse turned head and whinnied	f/b
8	As the twain stood there alone.	e
9	No Bird above that steep of time	a
10	Sang of a livelong quest;	b
11	No wind breathed,	c
12	Rest:	b
13	'Lone for an end!' cried Knight to steed,	d/c
14	Loosed an eager rein —	e
15	Charged with his challenge into Space:	f
16	And quiet did quiet remain.	e

(CP188)

In my previous discussion of 'The Song of Finis' I remarked on de la Mare's masterly use of linguistic techniques, and particularly of phonological devices, to intensify the atmosphere of loneliness and the unfathomed mystery of space in this little poem.⁷⁶ There is no doubt that the technique employed here, with its use of balladic repetition, Anglo-Saxon type of half-line alliteration, and the intertwining assonance, consonance and rhyme which join the contrasting stanzas together, is not accidental, but studied and deliberate. For we know that de la Mare was an assiduous craftsman, and we have before us, also, his references in reviews to the techniques of other poets. He often showed how well aware he was of the finer points of rhythm and versification which he used so successfully in this poem. For example, he wrote about the rhythm of some lines in *The Ancient Mariner*, a poem which he obviously admired and knew well:⁷⁷

The metrical basis of each line in turn exquisitely hovers, as it were, beneath its rhythms, like the shadow of a kestrel above a meadow. As for their longs and shorts, there is not only a continuous fractional

variety of measure in every syllable, as there is an intertwining of image, statement, emotion in each line, but the quality, in some indefinable accord, of each several sound (as does the colour) continually varies, (PS, p.144)

He showed, too, that he was conscious of the ominous and mysterious effect his own hiatus and broken rhythm in lines 11 and 12 of 'The Song of Finis' may well have, when he wrote of Maurice Hewlett's poems that 'there is . . . a kind of menace, a sense of the irretrievably broken in this disjointed rhythm'.⁷⁸

In 'The Song of Finis' the effect of this broken rhythm is increased by the contrast between the two stanzas. Stanza i is comparatively regular. There is a pattern of end-stopped, rhyming, predominantly iambic trimeters, with first-foot anapaestic substitution in lines 1 and 5 to 8, which gives an easy, rhythmical, story-telling atmosphere in the 'Once upon a time' tradition. In stanza ii, however, there is suddenly a dramatically different rhythm at lines 11 and 12, with the long pause and stress on the single monosyllable 'Rest', and a quite disorganized syllable count. There are also the unexpected four- rather than three-stressed lines (9, 13 and 15), taking their cue from line 3, and the heavily stressed trochaic substitution (this time) in the first foot of every line except 9 and 16. This conflict between rhythmical structures gives the poem an intrinsic sense of excitement and, together with other phonological techniques, adds melodic colour to the semantic picture of the knight and his horse teetering on the edge of the abyss of time and space.

How delicately, too, the poetic tension and ambiguity is heightened by the contrast, not only between the rhythmic, but also the syntactic structure of the two stanzas. Stanza i is all affirmative, with its realistic description of the knight, his armour and his horse. Stanza ii,

on the other hand, uses the negative 'No Bird . . . / Sang' and 'No wind breathed,' and the nullity inherent in the words 'Space' and 'quiet' to significant effect.⁷⁹ These negatives and the many silent pauses create a feeling of the loneliness and mystery of that 'steep of time'. Yet, at the same time, by the technique of contrast, they give a punch to the last four heavily stressed and alliterated lines which describe the knight's challenging charge into Space. The atmosphere of mystery and dream, which runs parallel to the concrete description of man and horse, is increased perhaps by the no doubt deliberate use of archaisms like 'sate', 'steed', 'visor' and 'twain' in stanza i, and also the repetitive ancient alliterative pattern accentuated by the capital letters.⁸⁰

There is lexical contrast too, which continues the tension and ambiguity. Concurrent with the 'literary' archaisms, extremely simple almost entirely monosyllabic words are used; there is no metaphor or simile, and certainly no lushness or vagueness of diction, as might be expected in such an apparently 'literary' and romantic subject. There is, in fact, a sharply chiselled effect in stanza i. This is a knight more in line with the practical hero of a fairy or folk tale than with a romantic knight of King Arthur's court or of *The Faerie Queene*. This no doubt helps to give the poem its dual appeal to the child and to the adult.

It is interesting to see how the purely technical use of an intertwining pattern of sound between the two stanzas becomes an inseparable part of the duality and mysterious under-meaning of the whole poem. It binds and unifies, by the use of similar rhymes ('steed' / 'freed' in i, and 'steed' in ii), and assonance ('whinnied' in i and 'steep' / 'breathed' in ii), and by alliteration, the two rhythmically

and semantically dissimilar stanzas. This acoustic chiming brings together in the mind of the reader, perhaps, the two associated pictures: in stanza i, the simple, realistic image of the adventurous and courageous knight of fairy tale, freed from the trials of his quest; and, in stanza ii, the more philosophical concept of the knight as representative of mankind, his long, sorrowful life's journey ended, leaping into the abyss which, in de la Mare's ever speculative style, is nameless. Phonologically speaking perhaps too, the whisper of mystery in the poem is enhanced by the use of sibilant 's', which echoes and re-echoes in every line except 11 and 16. Another linguistic device, which helps to convey an effect of inexorable progression towards a final end, is the use of reiterated anapaestic feet connected with the alliterated 'At the', 'And he', 'And his', 'As the' in stanza i. That end is, however, not elucidated for us — the strong, open-vowelled stresses of line 15 die away in the reiterated 'quiet' of the last line, and we know only that man leaves behind him nothing.

(d) "The Railway Junction"

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	From here through tunnelled gloom the track	a
2	Forks into two; and one of these	b
3	Wheels onward into darkening hills,	c
4	And one toward distant seas.	b
5	How still it is; the signal light	a
6	At set of sun shines palely green;	b
7	A thrush sings; other sound there's none,	c
8	Nor traveller to be seen —	b
9	Where late there was a throng. And now,	a
10	In peace awhile, I sit alone;	b
11	Though soon, at the appointed hour,	c
12	I shall myself be gone.	b (eye rhyme)

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
13	But not their way: the bow-legged groom,	a
14	The parson in black, the widow and son,	b
15	The sailor with his cage, the gaunt	c
16	Gamekeeper with his gun,	b
17	That fair one, too, discreetly veiled —	a
18	All, who so mutely came, and went,	b
19	Will reach those far nocturnal hills,	c
20	Or shores, ere night is spent.	b
21	I nothing know why thus we met —	a
22	Their thoughts, their longings, hopes, their fate:	b
23	And what shall I remember, except —	c
24	The evening growing late —	b
25	That here through tunnelled gloom the track	a
26	Forks into two; of these	b
27	One into darkening hills leads on,	c
28	And one toward distant seas?	b

(CP295—96)

I remarked in my previous discussion of this poem that it forms a contrast in style to the romantic 'The Song of Finis'.⁸¹ It is simple, natural, conversational, and quite modern in tone. The semantic content, which one might compare to the outline sketch for a painting, is gradually augmented by atmospheric effects, similar to the addition of colour, light and shade to such a sketch. These are created by a carefully studied rhythmical, lexical and very acute acoustic technique, this verse texture giving a kind of prismatic quality to the thought.⁸² De la Mare's object seems to be to present contrasting scenes of lively animation and an extreme quietness, and to suggest obliquely the idea that both the group of busy, active passengers and the solitary observer in these two scenes are journeying to a similar destination — death.

Concisely, by a very simple lexical choice, he tells us that the junction is a small country station. There are only two tracks, a single tunnel and a single signal light. Both the sea and some

distant hills are clearly visible from a platform where the narrator is entirely alone, once the seven other travellers have gone. A single thrush singing adds to the loneliness of the scene; and the sense of isolation is further heightened by the change of tenses from the present to the past, to the future, and back to the present again in the last stanza. In such a short poem this conveys a feeling of the continuous passage of time, not only within a day, but in a lifetime and in mankind's endless history of 'come and gone'.⁸³

The quietness of the station in stanzas ii and iii may recall the 'And quiet did quiet remain' in 'The Song of Finis', when the knight has confronted death 'At the Edge of All the Ages'. Death as the metaphorical close of life's journey is insidiously suggested in 'The Railway Junction' by two means. Each of the figures mentioned in stanzas iv and v contains a hidden symbol of death. The groom recalls Donne's simile, 'and Death, like a groom, will bring a "taper to the outward room"'.⁸⁴ The parson is dressed in mourning black. The widow has lost a husband to death. The sailor's cage can be taken as symbolic of the death of freedom — a living death.⁸⁵ The game-keeper's gun carries the image of death by shot; and the mysterious veiled woman reminds us that de la Mare believed death 'to be only a veil between one life and another';⁸⁶ and that the vision of a beautiful woman's face is often used by him as a symbol of Man's final goal at the end of life. In stanzas i—iii and v—vii de la Mare chooses words and phrases which denote the approach of night, which is so often synonymous with death. Note, for instance, 'gloom' and 'darkening hills' in stanza i; 'set of sun' in ii; 'late' and 'appointed hour', significantly juxtaposed in iii; 'nocturnal' and 'night' in v; 'evening' in vi; and, again, 'gloom' and 'darkening' in stanza vii.

Into this twilight peace is projected, in stanza iv, the observer's remembered picture of bustling vitality — an effect which is achieved by careful acoustic technique. There is a cacophony of jostling, staccato, alliterated consonants ('b', 'p', 'k', 'g') as, for example, 'The sailor with his cage, the gaunt / Gamekeeper with his gun', giving an impression of lively activity and noise. The hitherto comparatively smooth, basically iambic metre is broken up by the insertion of the extra syllables of anapaests and by the use of many pauses and end-stopped lines. This is all in contrast to the verbal texture of the other stanzas, particularly ii, iii and vii. There the rhythm of the three iambic tetrameters and one trimeter of each quatrain is smoother and more flowing, owing to the fact that the pauses are less frequent and less abrupt, and to the use of enjambement, particularly noticeable in stanzas i and vii. An effect of peace and quiet is achieved by euphony — soft, so-called 'lulling' nasal and liquid sounds ('n', 'm' and 'l') — instead of the cacophony of stanza iv; and by the preponderance of the soft voiced dental fricative 'th', particularly in vi.⁸⁷ These sounds, with sibilant 's', constantly repeated with plosive 't', combined with the regular rhythm, the alliteration on stressed syllables (e.g., 'How still it is — the signal light / At set of sun shines palely green'), and the railway scene itself, combine to suggest to the reader the regular, muted background sound of a train's wheels on the track.

These two contrasting sections in 'The Railway Junction' are, however, brought together and the whole poem unified into an organic whole, by another acoustic device. This is the twining pattern of rhyme, alliteration and assonance which forms a satisfying framework to the whole

conception. De la Mare was always strong in his belief in the importance of structural unity, and most of his poems illustrate this belief. In *Poetry in Prose* he wrote: 'In all literary composition it is the perfectly rational and lucid arrangement and order of the chosen subject-matter, the attainment of a beginning, a middle and an end, that are the all but insuperable difficulties' (PS, p.86). He continued: 'Every specimen indeed of literature worthy of the name . . . has an imposed and definite structure'(p.87).⁸⁸ The linkage of sounds which give 'The Railway Junction' its structural unity is illustrated by the assonantal pattern which links the stanzas and takes in the rhyme scheme (abcb) as well; for example, 'these', 'wheels', 'seas', 'green', 'seen', 'peace', 'keeper', which imperceptibly merge with 'one', 'sun', 'none', 'now', 'son', and 'gun' and are repeated together in the last stanza ('tunnelled', 'these', 'one', and 'seas'). There is an alliterative pattern too which, in stanzas i—iii and vii, is based mainly on 't', 's' and 'th', the 'th' being particularly predominant in stanza vi. But it is also predominant in the acoustically very different stanza iv, associated with the many plosive consonants already noted.

The framework of the poem is given the form of a circle by the almost exact repetition of stanza i in stanza vii, which might suggest the circular track of life.⁸⁹ Yet here there is a small but significant technical change which seems to be also an organic part of the poem. In line 26 de la Mare copies the trochaic substitution in line 2 ('Forks into two') but omits a foot, causing a hiatus in the rhythm. This seems to reinforce the lexical suggestion of a pause and the idea of a choice in the life of the solitary observer; is the hiatus that of death? Again, line 27 is an inversion of line 3 and perhaps provokes the

thought that, although life inevitably ends in death, the pattern of the end is not always exactly the same for every traveller. And in these two stanzas (i, and vii), the heavy stresses on the semantically important words ('track', 'Forks', 'two', 'one', 'hills' and 'seas') and the repetition of many small words throughout ('the', 'their' etc.), tend to give an impression of inevitability and finality. The whole circular form, taken together with the picture of the wheeling, forking railway track in the twilight; the mouth of the tunnel which leads into unexplored darkness; the people journeying in different directions towards some mysterious fate, gives strength to the suggestion that this is an allegory. The railway track may be synonymous with the path of life from birth to death. This is a comparison all the easier to make when one remembers the narrator's words in de la Mare's story 'The Lost Track', about the derelict railway line which 'like Life itself, emanates from no discernible whence, and vanishes out into no detectable whither'.⁹⁰

Unity for de la Mare is thus seen to be attained not only by formal stanzaic structure and theme, but also by patterning of the rhythm, lexis and phonology. Donald A. Stauffer wrote about the importance of formal structure in de la Mare's poetry: 'Many of de la Mare's subjects are so tenuous that they require such formal support to keep them from vanishing, and de la Mare has the tact of an artist in supplying these structures'. Later, in his chapter 'Poetry is Formal', he wrote more generally: 'Perhaps the greatest formal merit in the poetry of the present century might be called the sense of musical organization — the repetition with variations of dominating images, characters, events, words or phrases; much as motifs are repeated and varied to give structure to a movement in a symphony'.⁹¹ This dictum

but with the addition of acoustic repetition and variation is peculiarly applicable, I believe, to de la Mare. Perhaps the 'curiously compelling' quality of 'The Railway Junction', and its power of suggestion, which James Reeves noted, are accounted for as much by de la Mare's artistic and technical virtuosity as by the actual little drama he portrayed.

(e) 'The Cage'

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	Why did you flutter in vain hope, poor bird,	a
2	Hard-pressed in your small cage of clay?	b
3	'Twas but a sweet, false echo that you heard,	a
4	Caught only a feint of day.	b
5	Still is the night all dark, a homeless dark.	a
6	Burn yet the unanswering stars. And silence brings	b
7	The same sea's desolate surge — sans bound or mark —	a
8	Of all your wanderings.	b
9	Fret now no more; be still. Those steadfast eyes,	a
10	Those folded hands, they cannot set you free;	b
11	Only with beauty wake wild memories —	a (imperfect)
12	Sorrow for where you are, for where you would be.	b

(CP198)

De la Mare's use of the image of the cage has already been discussed with special reference to 'The Cage' and 'The Monologue'.⁹² In the three quatrains of 'The Cage' (*Motley*, 1918), de la Mare used three different, but favourite images — the caged bird, the voyager and the vision, and he knits these together into a synaesthetic lexical pattern of alternating sight, sound and movement. The construction is like that of Tennyson's 'Tears, Idle Tears', where the nostalgia and sadness is intensified threefold by calling into play, first what the eyes see ('In looking on the happy Autumn-fields'); then what the ears hear ('The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds'); and finally

what is physically felt by touch ('Dear as remember'd kisses after death'). The whole is unified by the incantatory refrain, 'the days that are no more'. And, as always in Tennyson, the effect is enhanced by the musical and rhythmic beat of assonance and alliteration as, for example, that evocative line in stanza iii: 'Ah sad and strange as in dark summer dawns'. Similarly, in 'The Cage', de la Mare used images connected with physical movement (the fluttering bird); sound (false echo and the sea-surge); and sight (homeless dark, the vision, and feint of day with its acoustic double meaning). These are bound together in the tension of a posed rhetorical question and answer pattern. Like Tennyson, too, de la Mare used vowel music, onomatopoeia, alliteration and repetition to enhance his effects.

In stanza i, the use of many monosyllables, pauses, plosive consonants and the harsh 'k' alliteration ('cage of clay', 'caught'), which are all, as it were, acoustic devices of a restricting nature, give an effect of confinement, consonant with the bird beating its wings against the hard, unyielding walls. In stanza ii, there is a magical onomatopoeic use of sibilant 's' and lulling 'z' to reproduce the sighing, surging sound of the sea. Then, following the hiatus and long pause after 'stars' (line 6), comes the flowing enjambement of lines 6, 7 and 8. Such devices might surely suggest a wave gathering strength, hesitating at its peak (at the dashes marking off 'sans bound or mark'), and breaking in a long, slow, sibilant hiss of descending water on the shore. The trimeter of the final line (8), with its dying fall, following the preceding pentameters, as well as the lingering of the voice on 'wanderings', enhances this effect. The idea of solitude and loneliness and suppressed intensity of feeling is brought about by the repetition of 'dark' in line 5, perhaps calling to

mind Tennyson's 'Break, break, break', and Milton's 'O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon' in *Samson Agonistes*.⁹⁴

De la Mare's favourite habit of inversion, seen in line 6, 'Burn yet', is shown to be most effective and not just a trick of technique, though it is difficult to analyse why it is so successful here. Coventry Patmore notes that there is a 'mysterious charm' and music in accentuating the first syllable of a line in this way: 'It will be generally found that in verses which strike the ear as extraordinarily musical, the peculiarity is mainly owing to an unusually distinct and emphatic accentuation of the first syllable in the metrical section . . .'⁹⁵ This inversion is not, however, just musical. Somehow the sustained stress on the verb 'burn', combined with the open-vowelled 'sonorous dark', 'unanswering stars' and 'mark', give an effect of distance and solitude.

In stanza iii, the heavy stops in lines 9 and 10, and the plosive consonants in 'fret', 'still', 'steadfast' and 'cannot set', give a sense of statue-like immobility, in keeping with the image suggested by 'steadfast eyes' and 'folded hands' and the word 'still'. The use of a longer final line (12), instead of the shorter trimeters of stanzas i and ii, suggests the resolution of the tension posed by the rhetorical questioning in lines 1 and 2, and the eventual attainment of some sort of resignation.

'The Cage' shows de la Mare's ability in the use of all kinds of linguistic acoustic technique, and in the choice of significant form. The tremendous variation in stanza form at his command which Luce Bonnerot commented upon, is also well illustrated by the change he made from the smoothly-flowing, long verse lines of 'The Cage' to the restless,

short lines of 'The Monologue', a poem which uses similar images and has the same nostalgic, yearning tone.

(f) 'The Monologue'

<u>Line</u>			<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	i	Alas, O Lovely One,	a
2		Imprisoned here,	b
3		I tap; thou answerest not,	c
4		I doubt, and fear.	b
5		Yet transparent as glass these walls,	d
6		If thou lean near.	b
7	ii	Last dusk, at those high bars	a
8		There came, scarce-heard	b
9		Claws, fluttering feathers,	c
10		Of deluded bird —	b
11		With one shrill, scared, faint note	d
12		The silence stirred.	b
13	iii	Rests in that corner,	a
14		In puff of dust, a straw —	b
15		Vision of harvest-fields	c
16		I never saw,	b
17		Of strange green streams and hills,	d
18		Forbidden by law.	b
19	iv	These things I whisper,	a
20		For I see — in mind —	b
21		Thy caged cheek whiten	c
22		At the wail of wind,	b (eye rhyme)
23		That thin breast wasting; unto	d
24		Woe resigned.	b
25	v	Take comfort, listen!	a
26		Once we twain were free;	b
27		There was a Country —	c/b
28		Lost the memory...	b
29		Lay thy cold brow on hand,	d
30		And dream with me.	b
31	vi	Awaits me torture;	a
32		I have smelt their rack;	b
33		From spectral groaning wheel	c
34		Have turned me back;	b
35		Thumbscrew and boot, and then —	d
36		The yawning sack.	b
37	vii	Lean closer, then!	a
38		Lay palm on stony wall.	b
39		Let but thy ghost beneath	c
40		Thine eyelids call:	b
41		'Courage, my brother!' Nought	d
42		Can then appal.	b

<u>Line</u>			<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
43	viii	Yet coward, coward am I,	a
44		And drink I must	b
45		When clanks the pannikin	c
46		With the longed-for crust;	b
47		Though heart within is sour	d
48		With disgust.	b
49	ix	Long hours there are,	a
50		When mutely tapping — well,	b
51		Is it to Vacancy	c
52		I these tidings tell?	b
53		Knock these numb fingers against	d
54		An empty cell?	b
55	x	Nay, answer not.	a
56	.	Let still mere longing make	b
57		Thy presence sure to me,	c
58		While in doubt I shake:	b
59		Be but my Faith in thee,	c
60		For sanity's sake.	b

(CP239—40)

The linguistic technique used in 'The Monologue' (*The Veil*, 1921) is in complete contrast to that of 'The Cage'.⁹⁶ It has less in common with that poem's romantic atmosphere than with A. E. Housman's precise, condensed and bitter-sweet poems like, for instance, 'Into my heart an air that kills'. It echoes Housman's 'land of lost content' and 'The happy highways where I went / And cannot come again' and the 'rose-lipt maiden' and 'lightfoot lad' of his 'With rue my heart is laden'. Stanzas ii and iii of 'The Cage' are generalised, the 'wild memories' unspecified, while 'The Monologue' is much more detailed and concrete in its imagery. The dramatic interior monologue form, with its continuous use of the personal pronoun (seen specially in stanzas i, iv, v and x), seems also to communicate a more intimate emotional distress to the reader.

The fusion of form and content is here complete. De la Mare used variation of syllable count and stress and line length, as well as various phonological techniques, to convey the effect of a prisoner pacing up and down a narrow cell, tapping at the wall, and speaking in disjointed phrases to himself and to the imagined prisoner on the other side of

the prison wall.⁹⁷ The rhyme scheme, while quite unobtrusive, gives a constraining, binding feeling as the rhymes follow rapidly at the end of the short, almost abrupt lines. These short lines, with the positions of the trimeters and dimeters being altered from stanza to stanza, create a restless, agitated effect in keeping with the prisoner's constant tapping movements and nervous staccato speech. This impression is enhanced by the high incidence of the cesura used in differing positions (9 to 11 in most stanzas, and never less than 5), and the almost continuous end-stopping. There is no smooth euphony and enjambement as in 'The Cage'. Furthermore there is a repeated use of plosive consonants and alliteration in nearly every stanza, particularly in stanzas v, vi, vii and viii (note for example lines 43—46).⁹⁸

All these devices, allied to the semantic values of such words as 'caged', 'clank', 'cold', 'rack', 'thumbscrew' and 'knock', tend to create a most vivid impression in the imagination of the cold, iron-hard surroundings of a prison cell. The images of a 'deluded bird', fluttering at the 'high bars', the straw in 'puff of dust', and 'the wail of wind' in stanzas ii, iii and iv — things all moving in an irregular, confused way — increase this feeling of restlessness and emotional distress.

(g) 'The Vision'

The image of The Lovely One, the Presence, so longed for in 'The Monologue', is presented by de la Mare in more detail in another contrasting poem 'The Vision' (*The Burning-Glass*, 1945).⁹⁹ This is a poem which illustrates the importance of the musical element in de la Mare's verse. In it phrases, words, rhymes and sounds are repeated, and are intricately interwoven into a felicitous and satisfying

rhythmic pattern, which may remind one of a musical composition such as a rondo. De la Mare had a great deal to say about music in his prose works, especially in his essay *Poetry in Prose*. A good writer must 'have music in his soul' and 'printed words resemble a printed melody in music' he said there. Later on he wrote that a writer has at his disposal 'innumerable muscular patterns of lips, tongues, pharynx'. — 'just as in music a *rallentando* slows up the pace but does not change the time, a crescendo may increase the volume without affecting the pitch, and an air played on a clarinet which the composer intended to be sung, alters the timbre but not the tune'. ¹⁰⁰

The Vision

<u>Line</u>		<u>Rhyme scheme</u>
1	O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair,	a
2	Aloof, remote, past speech or thought to bless —	b
3	Life's haunting mystery and the soul's long care,	a
4	Music unheard, heart's utter silentness,	b
5	Beauty no mortal life could e'er fulfil,	c
6	Yet garnered loveliness of all I see,	d
7	Which in this transient pilgrimage is still	c
8	Steadfast desire of that soul's loyalty;	d
9	Death's haunting harp-string, sleep's mandragora,	a
10	Mockery of waking and the dark's despair,	b
11	Life's changeless vision that fades not away —	-
12	O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair!	b
13	Hands faintly sweet with flowers from fields unseen,	c
14	Breasts cold as mountain snow and far waves' foam,	d
15	Eyes changeless and immortal and serene —	c
16	Spent is this wanderer, and you call him home!	d

(CP496)

Here, for purposes of intensification and pure musicality, de la Mare used the musical device of repetition and variation on a theme. For example, line 1, which contains the primary theme of the poem, 'O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair', is repeated in stanza ii, line 12. Then, secondly, the syntactic parallelism of the phrases 'Life's haunting mystery' (line 3), 'Death's haunting harp-string' (9),

and 'Life's changeless vision' (11), forms a similar, slightly differing, repeated secondary theme, elaborating on the symbolism of the face. The image of ice-cold purity that resides in the adjective 'starry' in relation to the face in line 1 is intensified by the semantically connotative adjectives 'aloof' and 'remote' (2), and is again reinforced by the phrase 'flowers from fields unseen' (13), with its vague hint of the young, virginal Proserpine.¹⁰¹ Further intensification is achieved by the phrase 'cold as mountain snow and far waves' foam' (14), with the adjectives 'cold' and 'far' repeating the ideas of 'aloof' and 'remote' (2). The third and final allied theme is that of the pilgrimage towards home, introduced by 'the transient pilgrimage' (line 7), and reappearing in the final, climactic line 'Spent is this wanderer and you call him home' (16).

There is a thematic build-up towards this important last line in the same way as there is a build-up towards the finale in a musical composition. Not only is this achieved semantically by the use of words bearing similar connotations, as already noted, but there is also a kind of rhythmic crescendo towards the final word 'home'. This seems to be contrived by the extensive use of trochaic substitution, commencing in stanza i and (except in line 12) becoming total in stanza ii; and also a strong spondaic movement which, coming after the strict exposition of the underlying iambic pattern in stanza i, line 2, has the effect of foregrounding the concepts and images in stanza ii. These initial stresses emphasize the important words 'Death' and 'Life'. And the physical properties of the Vision — Hands, Breasts and Eyes — seem to be heavily outlined like the features of a Rouault painting, giving more substance to the Vision, so tenuously presented in 'The Cage' and 'The Monologue'. The syntactic inversions in stanza ii (13—15) add to

this intensification of the image and to the music of the poem (as Patmore believed).¹⁰² It is interesting to note in this connection that while Garman thought that the use of inversion weakened the meaning by flouting the intellect, and Gosse that it showed languour of mind, Barfield believes it can be dynamic and express the energy of living things, which I believe is the case here.¹⁰³ Of course, as with other techniques like alliteration, inversion can be overdone, and de la Mare was sometimes guilty of this.¹⁰⁴ The success of the device obviously depends on exactly when and how it is used.

I have said enough previously on the subject of de la Mare's masterly manipulation of sound, and most critics are united in their praise of this aspect of his poetry. But one could write many paragraphs about his use, in this particular poem 'The Vision', of the techniques of alliteration, assonance and consonance — the chiming of consonants and vowels — to emphasize his rhythms and to produce a singularly musical effect. As Patmore said:

By a poet, who is a master of his art, and knows how to conceal such assonances by alliterating initial letters with others in the middle of words, or by employing similar consonantal sounds represented by different letters, and so on, the most delicate, as well as the most forcible effects, of emphasis may be given, as if by magic, and the impression of metre everywhere enhanced as if by an invisible agent.¹⁰⁵

Especially noteworthy in 'The Vision' is de la Mare's use of what one might term the sibilant and whispering fricatives 's' and 'h'.

'S' is used initially and in the middle of words in every line except line 5. In addition, the sibilant suffix '-ness' occurs as a rhyme (lines 2 and 4) and is repeated internally in both stanzas ('loveliness'(6); 'changeless' (11, 15)); while 'see'/'unseen'/'serene' form assonantal half-rhymes between the two stanzas at lines 6, 13 and 15. 'S' is allied onomatopoeically with the glottal fricative 'h' to create a peaceful, musical, whispering effect, as in line 9: 'Death's haunting harp-string, sleep's mandragora'. And the 'h' alliteration

throughout ('hair', 'haunting', 'heard', 'heart', 'harp', 'hands', 'him') leads up to the final, semantically important word 'home'. The last phrase 'call him home' is accentuated and made particularly prominent by the alliteration and consonance in association with the stressed diphthong 'o' in 'him home'. The musical and rhythmical effect of this alliteration is increased by the echoing of 'hair' in the rhyme scheme of both stanzas ('hair'/'care' (lines 1 and 3); 'despair'/'hair' (10 and 12)). Alliteration of the soft labio-dental fricatives 'f' and 'v', with the assonance and repetition of 'face' and 'grave' (1 and 12), adds to the euphonious adagio effect of the poem. In contrast to 'The Monologue', where the already short, clipped lines are broken up by many pauses, giving a restless effect, 'The Vision' has a smooth, musical fluency brought about by the mostly pauseless lines — ten out of the sixteen lines have a cesura only at the end.

This poem, the essence of romanticism and pre-Raphaelite imagery, possibly holds little appeal for the modern reader, who will probably dismiss it as a lushly eloquent hymn to a vague 'Beauty', which he has been taught to despise, and which now seems out-of-date in our modern, realistic world. De la Mare was of Pater's world — his view of art and literature, as I have said previously, was expressive. He believed in the concept of beauty and that we should be moved emotionally by poetry. 'The Vision' is typical of the romantic, idealistic, nineteenth century aspect of his imagination, and embodies in its construction many of the techniques of verse writing which he suggested are important in his *Poetry in Prose* and elsewhere. But it must not be forgotten that a poem like this is only one side of de la Mare's art, as I hope I have shown.

* * * * *

(4) CONCLUSION

De la Mare used his technical abilities to fashion poems which range from this romantic 'poetical' verse through the humour and wit of the limericks and nonsense verse in *Stuff and Nonsense*, and the nursery rhyme jollity of many of his verses for children, to the modern, conversational tone of such poems as 'Comfort' and 'The Feckless Dinner-Party', and the more philosophical depths of the poems which lead up to *The Traveller* and *Winged Chariot*. What is astonishing is the diversity of his work, not only in subject matter but in form. He manipulated metre and rhyme to create a great variety of stanzas — many most intricately woven. But he did not need to invent totally new and modern poetic structures. In his position astride both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he found the old forms already available to him sufficient for his needs. His stylistic mastery was such that he was able to mould to his own purposes the whole gamut of traditional poetic forms, from the simple ballad to the more complicated tercets in which he cast his *Winged Chariot*.¹⁰⁶

But, although de la Mare used basically the old traditional forms, he was still unique, as all good poets are. He knew that neither conservatism nor originality are necessarily the marks of great art. In this connection he wrote:

Poetry is invariably a revelation of the inmost thought and feeling of one solitary human being. Its excellence depends, superficially, upon its accordance with the great poetic tradition; essentially, upon its emancipation from it. But originality is no more necessarily a virtue than mere servile conservatism. It may proceed from freakishness, from vanity, or from mere ignorance. The world must judge. And since it is easier to discover resemblances than to appreciate differences, a poet who merely echoes his immediate predecessors . . . is sure of immediate recognition. And he is sure of ultimate oblivion. 107

Posterity will judge whether de la Mare will be reappraised academically and receive the recognition which I believe is due to him as a poet, or whether he will be forgotten. He attempted his own definition of poetry — that 'poetry we feel upon our pulses, that calls the rarest and strangest of all *Qui Vives*', and we may well test, and perhaps judge his own poems against that touchstone:

In form and expression it is condensed but not congested; it is complex rather than complicated; and even if it be incidentally obscure — by reason of its verbal construction, its references, or its profundity — it is never finally unintelligible. What it tells, while it may be pellucidly clear, is yet deep; it is rational, and yet lies beyond the arbitration of pure reason; and not only will the closest of paraphrases rob it of some vital virtue, but even although it is replete with sense it may be ruined by imposing upon it any detachable and extrinsic meaning. It is lit with beauty, though beauty was not its aim. We know this beauty to be present, but could not prove it to be present. We can scarcely say which entrances us most, the melody it sings or how it sings it; its formal vessel or the nectar it contains; the course it follows or the goal it arrives at. And although we may delight in it as naturally as we delight in water to drink, colours whereon to feast the eye, music to hear, ideas to ponder, human emotions to share, and that region of the imagination to which it admits us; yet its secret and very self, even when it has won in to the aware and engrossed company of our inmost being, may still in some degree elude us. (PS, pp. 124—25)

APPENDIX I

WALTER DE LA MARE'S VIEWS ON LITERATURE AND LIFE

ADDENDA TO CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

1. Is the character of a great artist revealed in his work? If style is the man himself, then it must be. What he omits from it of life, humanity and the visible is itself revealing, though there may be hidden reasons for the omissions.

Chardin, p.10.

* * *

2. The work of every writer therefore varies in quality and meaning and value at different times of his life; its last state may be (perhaps is bound to be in certain respects) worse than its first. But the finer and greater he is as an artist, so much the more signally, within certain limits, is that work the revelation of his own mind and spirit.

'Some Women Novelists'

PS, pp.238—239.

* * *

3. It is in a man's work that we must look for his deepest secrets.

'Feodor Sologub'

TLS, 24 June 1915, p.212 (*W*.119).

* * *

4. If that work is true to himself, it cannot but be the most uncompromising, essential, secret and infallible proof of his inmost spirit and his imagination.

'Christina Rossetti'

Essays by Divers Hands, 6(1926), p.100.

* * *

5. If a novelist's style bears the enduring impress of his inmost self, not less clearly his complete fiction is a kind of representation, in the large, of his life, look, and surroundings.

'Pour Les Militaires'

TLS, 27 March 1914, p.152 (*W*.78).

* * *

6. In the effort . . . to give his characters and scenes the vivid impressiveness of reality, the novelist . . . cannot avoid revealing not merely his powers of mind and imagination, but his spiritual and philosophical bias, his views of society, of religion, his 'values'.

'The Craft of Fiction'

TLS, 3 November 1921, p.705 (*W*.208).

* * *

7. Poetry is compounded of emotion as well as of thought and vision. And imaginative contemplation is a surrender of the whole consciousness to the being, the life, of what has moved and exalted it. The creative art is instantaneous, and in the expression of it words must as far as possible so be used as to produce the illusion of instantaneity. The result is a poem which, according to the intensity of its vision, thought, and feeling, reproduces in the reader the condition of life, of peace, of sorrow, and of ecstasy that was its inspiration.

'Some Recent Verse'

TLS, 2 July 1914, p.316 (W.86).

* * *

8. His poetry, like all other poetry, is no more to be analysed than is anything else in the world that is beyond the conscious manufacture of man.

'The Poetry of Barnes'

TLS, 11 February 1909, p.51(W.6).

* * *

9. A poem, of course, . . . consists not only of the images, ideas, feelings, emotions, and the sense of the presence of its maker which it may produce in us, it is a signal and isolated work of art. As such, with its rhythms, cadences, music, form, it has a certain entity, lovely and signal, which induces a state of the spirit only its own to confer. We can analyse that no more than we can analyse a moment of life itself.

'A Quiet Life'

Essays by Divers Hands, 20(1943), p.82.

* * *

10. All lyrical poetry, in the first place, is written for an audience of one; then perhaps, for one other, and then for the few: not often, and usually not too happily, for the world at large.

'Richard Middleton'

TLS, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).

* * *

11. Show us but a glint of the precious stone, we beg of the poet, and we will provide the sermons.

'Exuberance, Reality, Dreams'

TLS, 9 December 1915, p.456 (W.140).

* * *

12. Our master words, symbols for all that is near and dear, for all that we dislike or despise, are richly autobiographical. Our very selves are bound up with them. Memories and emotions cluster about them like the tiny sprigs of seaweed and the minute living anemones on the shell of a hermit crab. They are in the service of our solitude as well as of intercourse. They have become attached, as it were, to parcels of meaning and of things meant which throughout our lives we have kept more or less secret, and of which we alone can know — though we seldom may perhaps — the complete contents. At use of them we let fall a pebble into the secret waters of another mind and may catch the answering splash; but the ever-widening ripples are soundless and remain unshared.

Love, pp. xxxiii—xxxiv.

* * *

13. Every great poet is unique — to such a degree that the words he used are stamped with his very being, as wax is by a seal — he has won, for as long as our language endures a place, a niche in English poetry.

'The Writer in the Witness-Box'
'Poets and Poetry'

Listener, 14 November 1940, p.701.

* * *

14. Reverence for one's mother tongue, delight in its long history, and the desire after a lifetime's usage to have refrained from contaminating its purity, and even perhaps to have infinitesimally enriched its treasury, are incentives that may claim to be philanthropic.

'Pure English'

TLS, 3 May 1923, p. 293 (W.211).

* * *

15. One acute difficulty for the modern poet, then, is that of re-minting the staled English of his own day, littered as it is with deadalive abstractions, perished metaphors, mean slang, and a host of scientific neologisms seldom pleasing to the tongue, and of a vivid meaning not as yet digested by the imagination — to which knowledge must become almost as natural as reverie and dream before it can be of creative service.

Love, p. cxlii (footnote 1).

* * *

16. When then we read what they have written, we see again what they have seen so clearly; but we see it through their eyes and share their intense interest in it. They have made their words say not only what they thought, but what they felt — what intent and loving eyes have seen what keen ears have heard, keen nose has smelt, and sensitive fingers have touched. This is one of the many strange and half-secret things that the reading of poetry does for us; and we can delight in it, and in the sounds of the words that tell of it, even when we do not wholly understand everything they may *mean*. For the *sounds* of the words of poetry resemble the sounds of music.

Tom Tiddler's Ground, pp. 230—31.

* * *

17. Words are not counters but musical symbols, and saturated with tradition and remote nuances of significance.

'The Quintessential'

TLS, 12 August 1915, p.268 (W.128).

* * *

18. Every fine poem says much in little. It packs into the fewest possible words — by means of their sound, their sense, and their companionship — a wide or rare experience.

Come Hither, p.653, No.440.

* * *

19. We need to be constantly reminded that verse is not merely a decorated, flighty, exotic form of expression, but a translation of emotion and thought into the barest, because most essential, terms.

'Poetic Drama: The Mischoice of Theme'

TLS, 9 October 1913,
p.422 (W.65).

* * *

20. The sole technical feature and device, then, apart from obvious and regular rhyming, that severs verse from prose, and therefore — *if* we accept verse as the only vehicle of poetry — from poetry also, is a certain regular recurrence of rhythm, of elements of verse, in Shelley's phrase, which we call *metre*.

Poetry in Prose

PS, pp. 99—100.

* * *

21. Poetry at least cannot lie. Its rhythms beat not even to that of the heart but to some rare metronome of life.

'Things Not Seen'

TLS, 7 August 1913, p.328 (W.61).

* * *

22. Its rhythms are those of life itself. Its verbal melodies, harmonies and modulations are pleasures as pure and subtle yet instinctive as those of colour and music; its design and symmetry as those of architecture.

Love, p. cxxxiv.

* * *

23. Since what is being said may be a shade or two beside or beyond mere reason, because it springs out of the deeper mind, between wake and dream, this metre, and the obedience it implies, keeps it in freedom but within bounds.

'Poets and Poetry'

Listener, 14 November 1940, p.702.

* * *

24. Just as an impulse of life, delight and happiness makes a child dance and clap its hands, a pretty girl put on bright colours or . . . makes a blackbird sing at dawn, a nightingale on the edge of the dark, and a foal gambol in a meadow, so with poetry. Pulse of movement, cadence and rhyme, balance and echo and melody, are even more closely its expression than the meaning of its words.

'Mr. Gibson's New Poems'

TLS, 6 April 1916, p.162 (W.150).

* * *

25. . . . you will have revealed to yourself one of Shelley's, and indeed one of every poet's loveliest devices with words — to let the music of his verse accord with its meaning, and at the same time to please and charm the ear with a slight variation from the regular beat and accent of the metre.

Come Hither, p.499, No.9.

* * *

26. In verse rhyme serves melody, symmetry, balance. It helps to secure in varying degree a formal pattern, stresses a pause, satisfies expectation, and draws meaning together. Since, too, a rhyming word is in part a repetition of its fellow and in part not so, it confers on its context its own small burden of unity in variety, and of variety in unity. The wings of a building may be said to rhyme, the figures of a dance, the pattern in a Persian rug; the wings of a bird, the leaves on a twig, the markings on an animal, the eyes, brows and ears of a face.

Poetry in Prose

PS, pp.91—92.

* * *

27. A poet's worse is soon forgotten: the danger is that it may draw with it his best into oblivion.

'Stephen Phillips'

TLS, 13 January 1916, p.18 (*W*.144).

* * *

28. The mind may be a delectable ivory tower, aloof and secluded, but we come as it were home again to the body. And only a fool, surely, could look attentively even at his own hands and fail to be astonished by all that they have done for him. And what of eyes, ears, and the rest of his members?

Love, p. lxxi.

* * *

29. A poet is not merely self possessed, but possessed, and all his essential art is comparatively useless except and until the spirit within sets him to write, not as he would, but as he must.

'Obscurity and Clarity'

TLS, 1 January 1920, p.6 (*W*.200).

* * *

30. There is no poetry without art; but all poetry transcends conscious art.

'A Futurist of the Sixties'

TLS, 26 February 1914, p.97 (*W*.76).

* * *

31. Poetry is the outcome not only of an effort of will, but also of a rare and an imaginative impulse; and, like every other art, it needs some clear peace and quietness of mind, however momentary, for its creation.

'Poems in War Time'

TLS, 1 July 1915, p.217 (*W*.120).

* * *

32. The finest achievement of most lyrical poets — Keats, Coleridge, Herrick, Blake, Shelley — seems to be something apart and aloof from their mere workaday selves. It is the outcome of rare, heightened moments, of an elusive and, to a certain degree, alien impulse.

'Donne'

Edinburgh Review, April 1913, *PV*, p.159.

* * *

33. The poet, too, who attempts to distil the waters of his inspiration, to enumerate the 'points' of his Pegasus, is bent on the most treacherous of achievements. He may criticize and appreciate the work of other men justly and generously. He may talk of technique to his heart's content. But to enter in and scrutinize his self's self, to 'fix' his secret impulses, to master, and so circumscribe, his own philosophy, may lead not merely to self-satisfaction but to self-security — a giddy equilibrium.

'A Lapidary'

TLS, 1 May 1919, p.235 (W.180).

* * *

34. Not, again, that exactitude of observation is essential to the poetic, although imagination is.

'Flowers and Poetry'

PS, p.218.

* * *

35. Illumined by the imagination, our life — whatever its defeats and despairs — is a never-ending, unforeseen strangeness and adventure and mystery.

Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination, p.14.

* * *

36. What we make up in our minds, then, can be as supreme a delight to us, can busy all our wits, all our learning and any wisdom we may have, and is just as much a mystery as everything that we have found 'made up' for us already in the world around us.

Animal Stories, p.xxxii.

* * *

37. Our jaded, sated sense of fact is all a fallacy. A green meadow may be El Dorado and all the Indies to a simple and unexacting heart.

'Maps in Fact and Fiction'

TLS, 30 July 1914, p.362 (W.88).

* * *

38. The far-reaching, unstrained and quiet beauty that is for poetry its vindication and truth is rare. Rare, too, that single effort of the imagination, that punctilious elaboration of the reason, which fuse a poem into a consummate whole.

'Fiona Macleod'

TLS, 17 November 1910, pp.445—46
(W.30).

* * *

39. What, again, is the difference between the object visible to the inward eye (a) when it has been retrieved from memory, and (b) when it is purely imaginary? In dream, too, which eyes are we using?

Desert Islands, p.250.

* * *

40. One of the saddest reflections which can accompany the thought that we are hastening to decay is that our journey has been in all but a bee-line . . . to have left the world without seeing and praising more than a meagre fraction of it will make a melancholy and shamefaced cargo of some of us when we sit, glancing this way and that, amidst the night-hung waters of Styx.

'The Lure of the Map' *TLS*, 6 May 1920, p.282 (W.206).

* * *

41. Potential beauty in the world around us, in every blade of grass, wayside pebble, flake of snow, or the least motion of bird or butterfly, is so common that we should be habitually dazed and dazzled with delight. If, that is, we had the energy to perceive it and to 'take it in'. But this, in anything like due measure, is beyond human nature, except in a child or a Traherne.

Love, p. lv.

* * *

42. . . . the peculiar fascination of scrutinizing a section of a beehive or anthill under glass, densely busy, præternaturally absorbed, exquisitely equipped — just, marvel of marvels and miracles of miracles, living life.

'Shakespeare's England' *TLS*, 20 July 1916, p.338 (W.161).

* * *

43. Now and then the very self within challenges you from the eyes of a friend or an enemy. An infant's eyes, serenely slow in motion but at times of a marked vivacity though usually agaze, much more seldom disclose any inmate behind the window. It may be searching for secrets but keeps its own. The most casual scrutiny of its furrowed countenance, its body, limbs and general 'finish' cannot but reveal that it is fearfully and wonderfully made — the arched five-toed foot, the chill, clasping, lean-fingered hands, the shell-like nails, the small, flat, convoluted ear, the softly sucking mouth, the milk-blue eyes with their delicate brows and fringing lashes, the faint fair down, the silken skin.

Early One Morning, pp. 51—52.

* * *

44. The mind faints in a vacuum of the senses. And though Philosophy may be a goddess who can shower blessings out of her clouds upon her votaries, mankind will ever turn even to such a thought as the immortality of the soul with better ease if it can actually see in the shadow of the valley poor ugly Socrates looking out on the distant mountains, and rubbing his leg.

'Scenes and Portraits' *TLS*, 27 May 1909, p.198 (W.11).

* * *

45. Midnight finds us slowly and unamazedly descending the amazing steep of sleep. Our heads on our pillow, in an intimate silence, or amid a surf-like volley of voices, the curtain lifts, and the drama, the pantomime, the peep-show, according to the night's programme, stands revealed. With morning the puppet-master emerges once more in a kind of fading ravel of loose ends, and vigorously reassumes what day's sharper consciousness is pleased to call reality.

'Dreams'

TLS, 30 March 1911, p.127 (W.35).

* * *

46. When dreaming we share the imaginative outlook of the child, the lunatic, the primitive, and the man of genius.

Ibid.

* * *

47. Every fusion of memory, every fancy and fantasy, dream and day-dream, subsides into that vast repository designated the 'unconscious', of which we are not so unconscious as to be wholly unaware of its contents. And although at night we stop being awake, there seems little reason to doubt that we are engaged in dreaming in some degree the whole day long. There appears to be a perpetual hazelike drift of the visionary in the background of consciousness. The self slips from thinking into dreaming without any perceptible jolt or jar. There seems to be no detectable change in the fabric. But waking *breaks off* the dream.

Early One Morning, pp.133—34.

* * *

48. With school begins the blunting and the 'sharpening' of the world.

'Fiona Macleod'

TLS, 17 November 1910, p.445 (W.30).

* * *

49. We talk about growing up, but the oak is only the sapling come to maturity, and childhood is a haven of refuge at the end, as it was a porch out into wonder at the beginning.

'Stevenson's Letters'

TLS, 8 June 1911, p.217 (W.36).

* * *

50. Life viewed imaginatively is not an affair of crises; and viewed retrospectively, perhaps, death will have lost any suggestion of any kind of ending.

'The Novels of Mr. Conrad'

TLS, 15 January 1914, p.21 (W.73).

* * *

51. . . . Life itself, perhaps, as so many young children have surmised, will prove to have been in the nature of a dream, and death, of an awakening.

Behold, This Dreamer, pp.107—08.

APPENDIX II

PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH MR RICHARD DE LA MARE

MUCH HADHAM HALL, 25 JULY 1978

(Abridged)

RdeM: I don't really agree with what you say at the end of your summary about my father's status as a poet — that he probably cannot be classed as a major poet, but neither is he a minor one. I think it is too early to make a true assessment yet. When my son Giles and I were working on *The Complete Poems*, we were both surprised how many good poems there were. Of course, there is much mediocre work, but there always is when a poet has a large output. There are more than a thousand poems in *The Complete Poems*.

AB: I entirely agree with you. I too was surprised when I started reading the poems how good most of them are. For instance, I had never read the little epitaphs from *Ding Dong Bell*. They are so short and simple, and yet they are so strange and contain a lot of hints about the main themes of his poetry.

RdeM: Yes, many of them are little gems. Charles Causley, the poet, in a BBC programme said about him: 'The thing that I admire most about him, I think, is his extraordinary technical ability, I mean quite apart from the fact that imaginatively one's in the presence of a giant, he's a most wonderful craftsman'. He also said that his achievement was very considerable, and Vaughan, the interviewer on this programme, said: 'Since his death 22 years ago he has been much neglected'. We all agreed that the time is ripe for a reappraisal of his poetry. ¹

AB: I think so too — very little has been written in recent years

on your father in an academic way.

RdeM: A thing that always irritates me is the way in which the same poems keep appearing in anthologies. They are always from his early work, like 'Arabia' and 'The Listeners'.

AB: It annoys me too. Nobody seems to bother to read more than the well-known poems, and even the critics seem to read the same ones and say the same things about him. Luce Bonnerot says there are about thirty which are always being quoted. The later long poems, *Winged Chariot* and *The Traveller* are hardly ever mentioned.

RdeM: Yes, and these poems show that he developed, contrary to what most critics say about his poetry never changing.

AB: Do you agree, then, with Auden that he did develop — that he was 'a poet who continued to mature'? ²

RdeM: Oh! Yes, undoubtedly he did.

AB: Do you think Auden's choice of the poems in his anthology, and his preface good?

RdeM Yes. I think the best writers on my father were his friend, Forrest Reid — he was a writer himself, and was sensitive and discriminating;³ and J. B. Priestley, who was a friend of the family.⁴ Russell Brain's *Tea with Walter de la Mare* is also excellent.⁵ Brain was a strange man; he had queer-coloured eyes, very light blue, mixed with another colour. When my father was dying, I rang him up and asked him to come and see him. The article by Edward Wagenknecht on his book reviewing is good too.⁶

AB: Another book I think is valuable is Luce Bonnerot's *L'Oeuvre de Walter de la Mare*, a published French thesis.

RdeM: I haven't read it, but my son Giles has, and he thought it was good, and that Professor Bonnerot had understood my father well. We

met the family once in Florence, by chance. Once, we were in Normandy and hoped to see the family records at the Hotel de Ville, Bolbec. But that was the Roman Catholic side and not our Huguenot side, so they were not there. The Huguenot records were at Yvetot, but we didn't have time to go.

AB: You told me in one of your letters about a biography of your father being written by Mrs Theresa Whistler.

RdeM: Yes, when my father died in 1956, we asked Laurence Whistler to write the biography, and he agreed. Then he asked if his wife could be associated with it, and I said 'Yes'. But, after about six months, he did no more work on it and his wife continued with it. It is not completed yet. It is a critical biography and very long and requires revision.⁷ By the way, I was interested in your remarks about Robert Graves's adverse criticism of the poem 'Arabia'.

AB: Yes, he pulled it to pieces because the statements in it are not factually correct. For example, he said, that there are no forests in Arabia, because it is all desert, and so on.⁸ I am surprised that Graves, being a poet himself, should be so lacking in imagination as not to realise that your father was not writing about a geographical Arabia, but a metaphorical country; obviously he was thinking of a country of the imagination, in the line of *The Arabian Nights*.

RdeM: Of course. It does seem rather a thoughtless piece of criticism — not like Graves.

AB: Poets must live very much in a world of imagination, and I suppose you have to be an imaginative kind of person to appreciate how, for instance, your father said he sometimes felt that the world of imagination was more real than the real world. This idea has been criticised, but there are people, mystics and religious people for example,

who *do* think the life of the mind and spirit is more important and is more their 'real' world than the material world. The life of the imagination seems to have been more important to your father than the actual world.

RdeM: Yes, it is the same for a lot of artists. Thinking about and working on his poems took a very large slice of my father's life. You know, he was really very, very keen on technique. Among his papers we found books which show how he practised writing various different kinds of stanzas, metres and so on, and he tried his hand at poems in various styles. Incidentally, when he died, he left behind a mass of material, and the family have decided to sell all his papers to The Bodleian. There is a lot of work that could be done on the manuscripts and papers.

AB: What was your father's method of working?

RdeM: Latterly, in the thirties and forties at any rate, he used to have a draft typed out from his original manuscript, and then he worked over this many, many times. He was very interested in words; he thought Shakespeare a master of words. He used to spend a lot of time on the choice of words.

AB: Yes, I read in *Tribute* how Sir Stephen Tallents remembered him at the Food Office during the war spending his lunch hour trying out words on a scrap of paper.⁹ He was obviously a very conscientious craftsman, as Charles Causley said in that Radio programme you mentioned.

RdeM: In that programme I talked about my memories of my father. As a child, I remember his being interested almost solely in literary things, and he and his friends always talked about literary subjects. But as he grew older he became interested in other things. I remember him as being very handsome, and he used to go off to work in the Anglo-American

Oil Company wearing a top hat and a floppy bow tie.

AB: I read that when he was young he thought himself a bit of a poet and wore his hair long and wavy and had a velvet coat.¹⁰ Was he really like that?

RdeM: Oh! Yes, in his youth he was a little bit of a fop. He had a remarkable face and head, and a most pronounced sort of Roman nose. And there was always something of the actor in him. He did some acting when he was young; in fact, he met his wife in a drama society.

AB: That's funny! I thought he was so shy. But I do remember Priestley writing about his visit to your family at Anerley. Apparently you were all playing charades.¹¹

RdeM: Yes, we were always playing charades. It was really great fun. And I remember his friends coming when I was a child. We children liked Edward Thomas — he treated us like adults. But we didn't like John Freeman much.

AB: If his conversation was like his poetry, I suppose it was often rather consciously literary?

RdeM: Yes, it was a bit. Then there was Ralph Hodgson too — a great friend — he came a lot to the house. My father knew most of the Georgian poets, but he didn't really belong to any 'school'. He was only called a Georgian because he knew the Georgian poets and had his poems published in all the Georgian anthologies. He went his own way.

AB: Yes, all the critics unite in saying that he was unique. Some of his poems are very strange and ambiguous. Did he ever speak to the family about the meanings of any of his poems?

RdeM: No. But he used to read out his poems to us and to friends, and he would listen to criticism from people like Forrest Reid, but he did not discuss interpretations or technique. He was always being asked

about the meaning of 'The Listeners', and so he made up a particular explanation, but I think he was amused at the necessity for it. The poems are capable of different interpretations; every reader should take his own. But my father never discussed the poems like that, as far as I can remember.

AB: What about *The Traveller*? In Russell Brain's book I read that your father told him that if the earth is alive it must have an eye, and the Traveller's landscape was that eye. Is this the truth about the inception of the poem? I used to work in a hospital Eye Department, and when I was reading the poem I kept seeing references to parts of the human eye like the vitreous, the pupil, the iris, veins, the lens, and so on. Perhaps because I am familiar with the anatomy of the eye, I recognised these references more easily.

RdeM: I think this was the actual germ of the poem, but it grew and changed all the time. My father was very much influenced at the time by a book which he had read called *The Problem of the Tiahuanaco Ruins*.¹² The book describes an extraordinary landscape — the ruins of an ancient city in Bolivia, with great monolithic stones covered with hieroglyphics, placed together with no bonding material. The city was supposed to be 20,000 years old, on the shores of a lake high up in the Andes, and the book posed the question of how the city got there, so far up. It put forward a theory that there was, long ago, an enormous tidal wave and flood, when a moon before our present one hit the earth, and later the waters receded. This stony waste is the landscape of my father's poem, I think.

AB: That must be his 'lunar landscape', his Titicaca. What about *Winged Chariot*? How did that start?

RdeM: I remember my father working on and off on it for a long time.

I don't remember how it began. He just called it 'Clocks'. He was fascinated by time, which in the thirties was much debated. He read Dunne's book *Experiment with Time*, and was very interested in it. It was well-known at that time.

AB: I wonder if our concept of Time as linear is really the right one? If time can operate at different levels, then that might account for stories of ghosts and other supernatural phenomena, mightn't it?

RdeM: I find this Time question very interesting myself, and I have had several mystic experiences. I remember well when my father was seriously ill in 1927 and was on the point of death, we were all supposed to be going on holiday to Cubert in Cornwall. We did not want to leave him, but the surgeon said we must go so that he would not believe that he was so seriously ill.

AB: What was the matter with him?

RdeM: He had to have an operation for prostate trouble, but the surgeon should not have operated then because he had a septic tooth and got general septicaemia. The surgeon was terribly upset and used to visit him every night and make him promise that he would be alive in the morning. He blamed himself for operating. So, anyway, we all went to Cubert but, a week later, we got a message to go home because he was worse. When we got back the surgeon said that at least one member of the family must stay at Cubert to make him think things were all right. So I went back. I had to walk across the fields from Newquay station to Cubert but, as soon as I got there, I got a message to return. Walking across those fields I had a very strong mystical experience — it made me believe strongly that there is an after life. As you know, my father did recover.

AB: Did your father believe in the after life, and did he have a religious belief?

RdeM: I am sure he believed in life after death and in some sort of God, but he did not go to church. And he said his prayers — he says so in his poem 'A Portrait'. Didn't he write there that he was 'taught to pray'?

AB: Do you think that poem is a true picture of him?

RdeM: Yes, it is like him. You know, I remember another strange experience that H. M. Tomlinson and his wife had. They were visiting an antique shop in Croydon and Mrs Tomlinson was distressed because she saw my father in the shop through the glass door of a bureau, but he had not been able to come with them that day. She was sure she saw him, and yet knew that he couldn't be there. Later on she found her mother had died about the same time as she had seen this 'vision'.

AB: Your father wrote a lot about death. He was obviously very pre-occupied with it — not in a macabre way, but as if he was interested in what was going to happen after death, and in the whole concept of death. Those little epitaphs of his show great insight, I think. I know he loved going round old churchyards and reading the epitaphs. Did he take you as children with him?

RdeM: Yes, he did. I remember a particular old churchyard at Zennor in Cornwall which we used to visit. It was strange, when my father died, we were all conscious of his presence even after his death. We felt he was still with us, watching us with his usual quiet amusement. I remember when we were thinking about his funeral, we were arranging for him to be buried in Petersham churchyard, and we went over there. The scene was like one of his own stories. The churchyard was overgrown and deserted and in the distance was a lonely figure — a real de la Mare

solitary. Actually, it was the clergyman waiting for us! But, of course, we were then approached by St Paul's and Westminster Abbey. St Paul's was chosen because it seemed the most fitting place, as he had been a scholar at the Choir School there.

AB: He was keen on music wasn't he? Brain said he liked Bach, Mozart and Handel. Did he play himself?

RdeM: No, but he was always very interested in music; being a chorister at St Paul's he had music all around him of course, and then after the war when record technology began to improve, he used to buy records. He liked chamber music, quartets and so on. The family knew all the musicians of the day, like Bliss, Constant Lambert, Adrian Boult and others.

AB: It's no wonder then that his poetry is so musical. He talks somewhere about how you can't get the full meaning from poetry without hearing it spoken. Did he ever read to you when you were children?

RdeM: I can only remember him telling us stories, not actually reading from a book. He made up *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* for us, you know. We all loved it so much we wanted a sequel.

AB: Did he take you for walks?

RdeM: Yes.

AB: He seems to know so much about nature in his writings. Did he tell you the names of the flowers and birds and things?

RdeM: No, I don't think so particularly. But I was very interested when I was small in gardening. I can remember buying seeds and planting them in a little garden.

AB: What about your father's childhood? Was he a very solitary child, as appears from his poems?

RdeM: I don't think so especially. There were six children. He was

one of the three younger ones, so he had a sister and brother to play with. I think he had a very happy childhood, but he was probably introspective; he was certainly a great reader.

AB: Yes, you can tell from his books how much he read, and how catholic his taste was. Did your father tell you much about himself and his life?

RdeM: No, not really. I do remember though that the family were all very upset because he had a platonic love affair — this will come out in Mrs Whistler's biography. It had a very great influence on his work of course. You know his wife was twelve years older than himself, and this caused difficulties for him. And we heard about his school days. One of the masters, Canon Scott-Holland, was interested in him and in his writing, and always encouraged him in his work on the School Journal. They remained friends for years until the Canon died.

CHAPTER 1

THE MAN AND HIS LITERARY BACKGROUND

(1) INTRODUCTION: HIS PERSONALITY

- 1 'Kingdom' by Sir Edward Dyer, part of stanza i, as quoted in *The Oxford Book of Sixteenth Century Verse* (1932), No. 118.
- 2 '"My Mind to Me . . . "', *Private View* (1953), pp.251—56, abbreviated hereafter to *PV* (see list of abbreviations on p.4); this article was reprinted from *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1938, abbreviated hereafter to *TLS* (Supplement: Summer Reading Section); and numbered 214 in Edward Wagenknecht's 'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the London *Times Literary Supplement*', *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), pp.243—55, abbreviated hereafter to *W*. See A Note on the References, p.3, Nos. 5 and 6. In the Introduction to *PV* David Cecil remarked that this collection of essays 'is more inextricably of a piece with his attitude to life in general than is so with most critics' (pp. v, vi).
- 3 *PV*, p.256.
- 4 R. L. Mégroz, *Walter de la Mare: A Biographical and Critical Study* (1924); Forrest Reid, *Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study* (1929); Kenneth Hopkins, *Walter de la Mare, Writers and their Work*, No. 36 (1953); Leonard Clark, *Walter de la Mare, A Bodley Head Monograph* (1960); D. Ross McCrosson, *Walter de la Mare, Twayne's English Authors* (New York, 1966). A biography of Walter de la Mare is at present being prepared for publication by Mrs Theresa Whistler, assisted by Mr Humphrey Carpenter.
- 5 Russell Brain, *Tea with Walter de la Mare* (1957), abbreviated hereafter to *Tea*; *Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (1948), edited by Dr W. R. Bett, abbreviated hereafter to *Tribute*. Besides those mentioned in the text the following were contributors: J. Dover Wilson, T. Moulton, Laurence Whistler, Alfred Fairbank, P. H. Muir, John Masefield, T. S. Eliot, C. Day Lewis, Siegfried Sassoon, G. Rostrevor Hamilton, Lord Dunsany, Gordon Bottomley, Gerald Bullett, Richard Hughes, Richard Church, Frederic Prokosch, Earl of Sandwich, Dr Marie C. Stopes, Wilfrid Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Martin Johnson, Edmund Blunden, Edith Olivier, David Garnett, Robert Lynd, Henry Williamson, L. A. G. Strong, S.C. Roberts, Christopher Morley, Gilbert Frankau.
- 6 *Autobiography* (1936), p.284.

- 7 *Tea*, p.81.
- 8 'Mr de la Mare's World', in *Essays and Reflections* (Cambridge, 1948), p.27.
- 9 *L'Œuvre de Walter de la Mare: Une aventure spirituelle*, Thèse pour le Doctorat ès Lettres (Paris, 1969), p.20, abbreviated hereafter to *L'Œuvre*.
- 10 See Richard Church, 'Walter de la Mare', in *Dictionary of National Biography 1951—1960* (DNB), edited by E. T. Williams and Helen M. Palmer (1971), pp.293—95 ; 'Walter de la Mare', in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York, 1942), p.365; *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz (New York, 1955), p.271.
- 11 Hopkins (1953), p.8.
- 12 See *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare* (1969), abbreviated hereafter to *CP*; respectively, 'The Scribe', *CP*217, ii; 'Arabia', *CP*121, and 'Araby', *CP*739; *The Traveller*, *CP*501—516, p.501, iv; *Winged Chariot*, *CP*551—596, p.576, i, abbreviated hereafter to *WCh*. See A Note on the References, p.3, Nos. 3 and 4.
- 13 Forrest Reid, p.11.
- 14 *Tea*, p.26.
- 15 'A Recluse', *CP*473, iii. A collection of poems by de la Mare was entitled *Inward Companion* (1950), *CP*517—49, and see line 1 of 'Lost World', *CP*534: 'Why, inward companion, are you so dark with anguish?'.
- 16 *Come Hither: A Collection of Rhymes and Poems for the Young of all Ages* (1923), p. xviii, abbreviated hereafter to *CH*.
- 17 *CH*, p.xx, p.xii.
- 18 *CH*, p.vii, p.viii.
- 19 'The House', *CP*426, ii. Compare 'The House', *CP*522. See discussion of the image of the house in Chapter 6 (4).
- 20 'Myself', *CP*96—97, v. See also for example, 'The Phantom', *CP* 33—35, and 'The Sea Boy', *CP*153.
- 21 *Tea*, p.126.
- 22 Quoted in Kunitz, *Twentieth Century Authors* (1942), p.365.

- 23 Compare, for example, Browning's '"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"' and Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.
- 24 *CH*, p. xxxviii.
- 25 *Broomsticks & Other Tales* (1925), pp.3—29 (p.19, p.28). See A Note on the References, p. 3, No.1.
- 26 CP453—54, x.
- 27 *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, A Lecture read before Rugby School on 27 March 1919, p.13, reprinted in *Pleasures and Speculations* (1940), pp.172—99, abbreviated hereafter to *PS*.
- 28 'A Portrait', CP453—54, vi.
- 29 *Ibid.*, v.
- 30 *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe* (1930), third edition (1947), p.12.
- 31 *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), Chapter 2, p.14; Chapter 6, p.32.
- 32 *Tea*, p.86.
- 33 *Early One Morning in the Spring: Chapters on Children and on Childhood as it is revealed in particular in Early Memories and in Early Writings* (1935), Chapter 13, 'Autobiography', pp.164—65, abbreviated hereafter to *EOM*.
- 34 *Behold, this Dreamer: Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, the Unconscious, the Imagination, Divination, the Artist, and Kindred Subjects* (1939), hereafter abbreviated to *BTD*.
- 35 *Love* (1943).
- 36 Besides *CH*, de la Mare produced another anthology for children, *Tom Tiddler's Ground: A Book of Poetry for Children* (1931). His *Collected Rhymes and Verses* (1944) contains nearly all his own verses for children; he wrote twenty original stories for children and sixty re-tellings of traditional stories for them. See Leonard Clark, 'Walter de la Mare', in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick (1978), pp.360—66.
- 37 *Animal Stories*, chosen, arranged and in some part rewritten by Walter de la Mare (1939).
- 38 *PV*, pp.251—56 (W.214): see respectively pp.254, 251, 256, 252—53, 254, 252.
- 39 *DNB*, p.294. Arthur Lawford was the hero in *The Return* (1910).

- 40 In his review of *Walter de la Mare: Selections from his Writings*, by Kenneth Hopkins, *English*, 11 (1956), p.72.
- 41 *Tea*, p.60.
- 42 With regard to the looking-glass, it is noteworthy that de la Mare greatly admired Lewis Carroll and his Alice books. 'There is nothing like the world of Alice', he said to Brain (*Tea*, p.125). In *Tom Tiddler's Ground* he included 'Beautiful Soup' from *Alice in Wonderland*, and 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' from *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, and he wrote in the notes that 'there are very few books I should be sorrier never to have read. If you look through a little piece of cut glass or a lustre you will not only see tiny rainbows everywhere, but everything in the world looks different — just as the queerest things in a dream may be like what you see every day, and yet — not like' (p.217). His lecture to the Royal Society of Literature on *Lewis Carroll* in 1930 was published in 1932.

(2) BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- 43 The details in this section have been kindly checked by Walter de la Mare's son, Mr Richard de la Mare (personal letter, 27 April 1978) and also by Mr Humphrey Carpenter who is assisting Mrs Theresa Whistler in the preparation of a biography of Walter de la Mare (personal letter, 5 September 1983).
- 44 Mégroz (1924), Chapter 2, pp.18—22, p.48, and Appendix B., pp. 289—92. See also *L'Œuvre*, p.420, note (2).
- 45 See *EOM*, p.582, for a mention of de la Mare's mother Lucy.
- 46 De la Mare gives an account of how his maternal grandfather on the voyage in *The Convict Ship* had tried to teach the men sentenced to transportation the rudiments of learning. See *EOM*, pp.582—83.
- 47 *EOM*, pp.582—83.
- 48 See *Tea*, p.100, where de la Mare also mentions his father. Mr Richard de la Mare says that, in fact, he had two aunts. The old ladies listed appear in the poem 'Miss Loo', CP103; in 'Miss Duveen' and 'Seaton's Aunt' in *Riddle*, pp.69—89 and 97—141; and in 'Miss Jemima' and 'Lucy' in *Broomsticks*, pp.45—78 and 137—72.
- 49 See Charles Aubrey Wood, 'A Critical Examination of the Poetry of Walter de la Mare with special reference to the Poetry of 1902—1913' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of London, 1967), section on 'Biography'.

- 50 'The Stranger', *CP*118, i, ii.
- 51 De la Mare recalled something of his father's death in *EOM*, pp.293—94. Some other childhood memories were also noted in *EOM*: his nurse, sister and a brass band (pp.169—70); the beach at Ventnor (p.303); massacring some purple thistles (p.303, an event commemorated in 'The Massacre', *CP*93—94); and a conjuring trick (pp.584—85). He also recounts other childhood memories in the notes to *CH* and *Tom Tiddler's Ground*.
- 52 Clark (1960), p.17.
- 53 Mégroz, pp.23—35. See de la Mare's own account in 'I Became an Author', *Listener*, 8 September 1938, pp.473—74, 505 (p.474).
- 54 Anon., 'Mr Walter de la Mare', *TLS*, 24 April 1953, p.269.
- 55 Mégroz, p.34.
- 56 *Tea*, p.93. De la Mare remarked that 'in boyhood — also by no means an unusual fact in the lives of dreamers — come symptoms of a dual nature', in 'Fiona Macleod', *TLS*, 17 November 1910, pp.445—46 (*W*.30).
- 57 *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.473.
- 58 'Afoot in England', *TLS*, 1 July 1909, p.244 (*W*.15).
- 59 'Walter de la Mare: An Appreciation', *English Studies*, 5 (1923), pp.1—22 (p.7).
- 60 *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.474. His early pseudonym was Walter Ramal.
- 61 See Kunitz, *Twentieth Century Authors*, p.365. Frank Swinnerton wrote that 'de la Mare admitted that he had taken extraordinary pleasure in wearing strange hats and coats of outrageous colours', in *Figures in the Foreground: Literary Reminiscences 1917—1940* (1963), p.204.
- 62 See Mégroz, p.35; Forrest Reid, p.14.
- 63 *DNB*, p.295.
- 64 Forrest Reid, pp.17, 38, 39. 'John Mouldy', *CP*7.
- 65 Review in 'At the Sign of the Ship' monthly causerie in *Longman's Magazine*, March 1902, quoted in Mégroz, p.45.
- 66 *CP*6, iv. See the Bibliographical Appendix to *CP*, p.889, for information about *Songs of Childhood*.

- 67 *Ding Dong Bell* (1924), revised and enlarged edition (1936). The poems from this book of stories are reprinted in CP743—59. See footnotes on pp.743, 748, 751, 756, and the Bibliographical Appendix, p.893.
- 68 A. C. Ward, *Longman's Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature* (1970), p.166.
- 69 Anon., 'Walter the Rhymer: The Poetic Style of de la Mare', *TLS*, 12 March 1970, pp.281—82 (p.281). In criticising 'Peak and Puke', it must be remembered that de la Mare was probably experimenting in this poem for children with the use of old dialect words which he loved (see *CH*, note to No.302, p.605).
- 70 *Henry Brocken: His Travels and Adventures in the Rich, Strange, Scarce-Imaginable Regions of Romance* (1904). The unpublished Introduction is quoted in Forrest Reid, pp.53—55 (p.54).
- 71 *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922—1949* (1949), pp.189—90.
- 72 Introduction to *Henry Brocken* in Reid, p.54.
- 73 See Preface to *PV*, p.xii.
- 74 Sir Henry Newbolt, *My World as in my Time: Memoirs 1862—1932* (1932), p.281.
- 75 *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.474.
- 76 See *PV*, pp. xii-xiii, for de la Mare's account of how he started on his career of book reviewing and his meeting with Mr Bruce Richmond, the editor of *TLS*.
- 77 Personal communication, 27 April 1978.
- 78 See *L'Œuvre*, p.425, note (33). Mégroz (p.47) said that he 'did not ever enjoy reviewing and gave it up as soon as circumstances permitted'.
- 79 *DNB*, p.294; A. St John Adcock, *Gods of Modern Grub Street* (1923), p.75.
- 80 'A Memory of 1917—18', in *Tribute*, pp.86—90 (p.88).
- 81 See Edward Marsh, *A Number of People: A Book of Reminiscences* (1939), p.326; and Christopher Hassall, *Edward Marsh: Patron of the Arts: A Biography* (1959), p.460.
- 82 Hassall, pp.299—300.

- 83 See Marsh's account of Georgian Poetry, Chapter 14, pp.319—30 (p.328). See also Hassall's Chapter 9 on 'Georgian', pp.180—21; Frank Swinnerton, *Figures in the Foreground*; and Edgar Jepson, *Memories of an Edwardian and Neo-Georgian* (1937), pp.135—96. Jepson and de la Mare used to have a quick lunch together in Selfridge's basement while they were working during the War at the Food Economy Campaign and the Ministry of Food respectively.
- 84 This information was supplied personally by Mr Humphrey Carpenter (letter, 5 September 1983). See also 'Interview with Mr Richard de la Mare', Appendix II.
- 85 *Love*, Preface, p.vi and Introduction, p.lxxix. Compare Edwin Muir (a poet whom de la Mare admired): 'For me too love is the supreme quality and more closely connected with immortality than any other, immortality either as you or I conceive it' (to Stephen Spender, 21 March 1944), quoted in P. H. Butter, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir* (1974), p.138. For a further discussion on de la Mare's attitude to love, see Chapter 4 of this thesis.
- 86 According to Mr Humphrey Carpenter, throughout his life de la Mare had to have a 'Beatrice' and fell romantically in love several times (personal communication, September 1983).
- 87 See Anon., review of *PV*, *TLS* 7 August 1953, p.506.
- 88 'What Lovely Things', in *Tribute*, pp.15—18 (p.17).
- 89 De la Mare's other important collections of poetry were: *The Fleeting* (1933), *Memory* (1938), *The Burning Glass* (1945), *Inward Companion* (1950). For more complete bibliography, see the Bibliographical Appendix to *CP*, pp.889—899, and Bonnerot, *L'Œuvre*, pp.475—500.
- 90 The important collections of stories were: *The Riddle and Other Stories* (1923), *The Connoisseur and Other Stories* (1926), *On the Edge: Short Stories* (1930), *The Wind Blows Over* (1936), *A Beginning and Other Stories* (1955).
- 91 See Hassall, p.398. We know that de la Mare met Willem van Doorn in Amsterdam (*English Studies*, 5 (1923), p.7), and was with Newbolt in Italy (*My World as in my Time*, p.281).
- 92 Clark (1960), p.11.
- 93 *Autobiography*, p.285.
- 94 *Tribute*, p.15.
- 95 See Frederick Boas, 'Some Links with Walter de la Mare', in *Tribute*, pp.91—94, in connection with the Royal Society of Literature and

the inception of the co-ordinated surveys of particular periods, *The Eighteen-Seventies*, etc., and his connection with the English Association. Bonnerot (p.496) gives a list of de Mare's lectures to the Royal Society of Literature which cover the period 1915—1942. He was awarded the Library Association's Carnegie Medal in 1948, and the Foyle Poetry Prize in 1954.

- 96 *L'Œuvre*, p.24. Bonnerot presents a brief biographical portrait in her Chapter I, 'Vie et Personnalité', pp.21—30.
- 97 *Tea*, pp.16,17, Church, *DNB*, p.294.
- 98 *Tribute*, p.88; p.15.
- 99 *A Number of People*, p.118.
- 100 Sixty limericks and nonsense rhymes were collected in *Stuff and Nonsense and So On* (1927) with woodcuts by Bold. The epigraph reads: 'Oft on the dappled turf at ease/I sit, and play with similes.' See CP843—88 and Bibliographical Appendix, pp.893—94.
- 101 Marsh, 'Dedicatory', *Tribute*, p.11; *Tea*, p.19.
- 102 Clark (1960), p.24.
- 103 Mégroz, p.3.
- 104 CP281—82; CP146.
- 105 *Tea*, p.103.
- 106 See *DNB*, p.294. De la Mare wrote about his own 'lifelong habit not only of indiscriminate interrogation but of insisting on arguing in relation to what [he] knew practically nothing about', in his foreword to Martin Johnson's *Art and Scientific Thought: Historical Studies towards a Modern Revision of their Antagonism* (1944), page v.
- 107 See Mégroz's description on pp.2—3 of his *Walter de la Mare*.
- 108 See respectively: Clark, p.19; *Tribute*, p.15; *Autobiography*, p.284.
- 109 *Walter de la Mare: A Checklist*, prepared on the occasion of an exhibition of his books and MSS at the National Book League 7 Albemarle Street London W 1, 20th April to 19th May 1956, compiled by Leonard Clark and published for the National Book League at The University Press Cambridge 1956.
- 110 'Walter de la Mare Exhibition', *English*, 11 (Spring, 1956), p.51.
- 111 See the notice about de la Mare's funeral in *The Times*, 29 June 1956, p.10.

- 112 *Tea*, p.39.
- 113 *Tea*, pp.122, 125. Compare again Edwin Muir, who said to his wife just before his death: 'There are no absolutes, no absolutes', see P. H. Butter, *Edwin Muir: Man and Poet* (1966), p.300.
- 114 For some of these lists see: Introduction to *Animal Stories*, pp. xvii, xxxi, xlii; Introduction to *Love*, pp. xxxvii, liv, cxxxviii; Introduction to *BTD*, pp.3, 77; Introduction to *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, p.18. Mégroz comments on de la Mare's 'peculiar kind of cataloguing of unexpected objects and incidents', and his 'gorgeous heaps of things all glittering in bright names', in *Walter de la Mare*, pp.55, 57.
- 115 Foreword to *Art and Scientific Thought*, page v. Compare also on page viii: 'The inconceivably remote and the exquisitely minute are much the same thing in effect to the contemplative mind'.
- 116 Marsh, *A Number of People*, p.286.
- 117 Hassall, *Edward Marsh*, p.493.
- 118 See respectively: CP798, CP242, CP811, CP229, CP871, CP245.
- 119 De la Mare said that 'Art for Art's sake is cant' in 'I Became an Author', *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.505.
- 120 (i) Henry King, *The Adelphi*, 2 (January 1925), 704—708 (p.704).
(ii) Leonard Clark (1960), p.9.
(iii) J. I. M. Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* (Oxford, 1963), p.14.
(iv) Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: The Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal 1910—1922* (1967), p.186.
(v) A. C. Ward, *Longman's Companion to 20th Century Literature* (1970), p.166.
- 121 See respectively: Fraser, in a review of Timothy Rogers, *Georgian Poetry 1911—1922*, The Critical Heritage Series, *TLS*, 17 June 1977, p.734; Katharine Cooke, 'The Georgian Poets: A Critical Examination of Their Poetry and Poetic Theory' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1973), p.344; *TLS*, 7 August 1953, p.506; Middleton Murry, 'Present Condition of English Poetry', in *Aspects of Literature* (1920), p.140; Ross, *The Georgian Revolt* (1967).
- 122 David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1976), p.183.
- 123 *PV*, p.254.

(3) THE GEORGIANS

- 124 *Georgian Poetry 1911—1912* (December 1912); *Georgian Poetry 1913—1915* (November 1915); *Georgian Poetry 1916—1917* (November 1917); *Georgian Poetry 1918—1919* (November 1919); *Georgian Poetry 1920—1922* (November 1922).
- 125 See Robert Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal 1910—22* (1967), pp.118—19 and footnote on p.119, for an account of the inception of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies. See also Hassall, pp.189—90.
- 126 See her Introduction to the anthology (1933), p.vi.
- 127 *Georgian Poetry 1911—1922*, *The Critical Heritage* (1977), pp.xi—xii.
- 128 *Georgian Poetry*, selected and introduced by James Reeves, *The Penguin Poets* (1962), p.xix.
- 129 *Twentieth Century Poetry: an Anthology*, edited with an introduction by Harold Monro (1929), p.9.
- 130 Reeves, p.xix.
- 131 Anon., 'Edwardian Poets', *TLS*, 20 March 1953, p.186.
- 132 'The Georgian Renaissance', *Rhythm* (March 1913), pp.xvii—xx, reprinted in Rogers, p.104.
- 133 W. H. Hamilton, *John Masefield: A Critical Study* (1922), p.11.
- 134 John Masefield, *So Long to Learn: Chapters of an Autobiography* (1952), p.105.
- 135 'It may also be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal', J. M. Synge, Preface to his *Poems* (1908), quoted by Perkins, p.81.
- 136 For the 'lady moon' type of poem, see for example 'Counting Sheep' by William Kerr in *Georgian Poetry 1920—1922*, p.112. There were 8 poems by Siegfried Sassoon and one by Isaac Rosenberg in *Georgian Poetry 1916—1917* and, again, 9 poems by Sassoon in *Georgian Poetry 1918—1919*.
- 137 Anon., 'Georgian Poetry: New Style', *TLS*, 11 December 1919, p.738.
- 138 See respectively: Murry, 'The Condition of English Poetry', *Athenaeum*, 5 December 1919, reprinted in Timothy Rogers, p.231; George MacBeth refers in this way to T. S. Eliot's criticism of the Georgians, and calls him 'the most influential enemy' of Georgian poetry, in 'Georgian Poetry 1912—1922', in 'Selected Books', *London Magazine* (June 1962), p.74; F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), Peregrine Books (1963), p.56.

- 139 *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse*, edited with an introduction by Kenneth Allott (1950), p.14.
- 140 *A History of Modern Poetry* (1976), pp.203—204 (Chapter 10 on 'The Georgian Poets').
- 141 John Press, *A Map of Modern English Verse* (1969), p.105.
- 142 *TLS*, 17 June 1977, p.734.
- 143 Herbert Palmer, *Post-Victorian Poetry* (1938), pp.71—72, 73—74.
- 144 See Ross, p.240. Palmer in his Preface, p.ix, wrote: 'Then as time went on some of its traditional elements changed into what might be termed Neo-Georgian'.
- 145 Ross, p.15.
- 146 C. K. Stead, *The New Poetic* (1964).
- 147 Stead, p.189.
- 148 *A Map of Modern English Verse*, p.108, p.111.
- 149 Press, p.4. Note that he omits de la Mare, whose inclusion this thesis argues for.
- 150 *A History of Modern Poetry*, pp. 171, 226, 226, respectively.
- 151 *Georgian Poetry 1911—1922*, p.xi.
- 152 'The Georgian Poets: A Critical Examination of their Poetry and Poetic Theory', p.321.
- 153 *A History of Modern Poetry*, pp. 204, 203, 204, respectively.
- 154 Luce Bonnerot emphasises de la Mare's individuality, and describes him as 'le grand individualiste de son temps, poursuivant obstinément sa quête, en marge, non pas de la vie, mais des grands bouleversements littéraires, techniques et sociaux de notre civilisation moderne', *L'Oeuvre*, p.329. In a personal letter (7 March 1981) she wrote again: 'Indeed de la Mare has been neglected and undervalued because his verse is so personal — nothing to do with fashions'.

CHAPTER 2

HIS VIEWS ON LITERATURE:
FROM HIS CRITICAL AND OTHER PROSE WRITINGS

- * Walter de la Mare, 'Shakespeare Personally', *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p.198 (W.82).

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1 See Chapter 1, Note 4. John Atkins, *Walter de la Mare: An Exploration* (1947), Henry Charles Duffin, *Walter de la Mare: A Study of his Poetry* (1949).
- 2 *PS* contains: 'Poetry in Prose' (1936), 'Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination' (1919), 'Flowers and Poetry' (1937), 'Some Women Novelists' (1929), 'The Dream' (1935), and contributions to the *Times Literary Supplement* (see Introduction to *PS*, p.ix). *PV* contains 'a mere fraction of the reviews and the like which were contributed years ago . . . to the *Times Literary Supplement*, to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, and to the *Edinburgh Review*' (See Preface to *PV*, p.ix). Other important essays include *The Printing of Poetry* (1931), *Lewis Carroll* (1932) and *Christina Rossetti* (1926).
- 3 Edward Wagenknecht in 'Walter de la Mare, Book Reviewer' lists in a footnote de la Mare's critical writings shown in the periodical indexes up to 1940, and his published essays and articles, see *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), 211—236 (p.211). His 'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the London *Times Literary Supplement*' on pages 243—255 of the same journal is invaluable (see Chapter 1, Note 2).
- 4 W. H. Auden, Introduction to his *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse* (1963), p.25.
- 5 *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.21.
- 6 *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p.198 (W.82).
- 7 'The Poet of Spoon River', *TLS*, 21 September 1916, p.451 (W.164).
- 8 See 'Mr.Hardy's Lyrics', *TLS*, 27 November 1919, 681—82 (p.681), *PV*, 95—103 (p.96) (W.196).
- 9 'A Woman's Genius', *TLS*, 22 January 1914, p.33 (W.74).
- 10 'Walter de la Mare, Book Reviewer', *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), p.231.

- 11 'Pour les Militaires', *TLS*, 27 March 1914, p.152 (W.78).
- 12 For further quotations from de la Mare on the subject of the artist being revealed in his work, see Appendix I, nos.1—6.
- 13 *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), p.212, footnote 2 reads: 'The list printed on pp.243—255 I owe to the kindness of Mr. de la Mare and the *Times Literary Supplement*'. Wagenknecht has no list of the contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* or the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*.
- 14 pp. 211—212 (footnote 2).
- 15 Introduction to *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (1931), 3rd edition (1961), pp.16—17.
- 16 *L'Œuvre de Walter de la Mare*, 'Le Critique', pp.51—74.
- 17 *PS*, page x.
- 18 *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p.18.

(2) POETRY

- 19 'I am just one of that group of writers who have been labelled Georgians — no compliment having been intended', said de la Mare in 'Poets and Poetry', part of a discussion between him, Stephen Spender and Desmond Hawkins, 'The Writer in the Witness-Box', in *The Listener*, 14 November 1940, pp.701—02 (p.701).
- 20 R. K. R. Thornton discusses the Decadents and the Anti-decadents in his Introduction to *Poetry of the 'Nineties*, Penguin Poets (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp.15—23.
- 21 In a review of Conrad's *Victory*, de la Mare quoted Flaubert: 'Life is so hideous that the only way of enduring it is to avoid it. And it may be avoided by living in art, in ceaseless search for truth rendered by beauty', 'At the World's End', *TLS*, 30 September 1915, p.330 (W.134); See also, however, Chapter 1, note 119, 'Art for Art's sake is cant'.
- 22 'Excursions and Alarums', *TLS*, 14 September 1922, p.580 (W.210).
- 23 'Georgian Poetry', *PV*, pp.123—133 (p.127), *Edinburgh Review*, April 1913. See A Note on the References, page 3, No. 5.
- 24 'Flowers and Poetry', *PS*, pp.200—232 (p.216). De la Mare quoted Keats's phrase in *Love*, page cxxxviii. Pater's theory of living was based on the sense of the paramount value of aesthetic experience and, like Keats, he aspired to love the principle of beauty in all things.

- 25 'This selection of the precise word is something that Henry James was good at, but Chekhov even better', *Tea*, p.38.
- 26 *Tea*, p.79.
- 27 'The sesame must be our own', 'Happy Those Early Days', *TLS*, 6 April 1933, p.245 (W.213).
- 28 See his Introduction to M. M. Johnson, *The Hedgerows: Poems* (1949), page xi; and compare Housman: 'Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it', and Coleridge: 'Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood'.
- 29 *TLS*, 14 September 1922, p.580 (W.210). Compare 'The English Lyric', *TLS*, 2 October 1913, p.406 (W.64), where de la Mare said that Ernest Rhys might have spent more time on 'the obscure but absorbing problem of what constitutes the impulse, nucleus, creative process, and ultimate significance of the lyric, and also on a close and curious technical analysis of one or two examples'.
- 30 *TLS*, 1 July 1909, p.244 (W.15).
- 31 *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), pp. 19 and 35.
- 32 'New Lamps for Old', *TLS*, 6 November 1913, p.506 (W.69).
- 33 See respectively: 'Mr Masfield's New Poems', *TLS*, 7 September 1916, p.427 (W.163); 'Drum-Taps', *TLS*, 1 April 1915, pp.105—06 (W.110); 'Poems in War Time', *TLS*, 1 July 1915, p.217 (W.120); 'Exuberance, Reality, Dreams', *TLS*, 9 December 1915, p.456 (W.140); '"Thamar" and Other Poems', *TLS*, 25 December 1919, p.779 (W.199).
- 34 *Come Hither*, p.583, note to No.225.
- 35 'Black, White and Grey', *TLS*, 11 October 1917, p.488 (W.172). For further quotations from de la Mare on the general subject of poetry, see Appendix I, nos. 7—11.

(3) WORDS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- 36 'Two Books of Verse', *TLS*, 15 June 1916, p.282 (W.159).
- 37 See *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.473, and Preface to *PV*, page xi: 'It was the case of an old man well into his seventies — and words still his merchandise'.
- 38 See 'New Numbers', *TLS*, 20 March 1914, p.138 (W.77).
- 39 'Pure English', *TLS*, 3 May 1923, pp.293—94 (p.293), *PV*, p.239 (W.211).

- 40 'A Book of Words', *TLS*, 1 June 1922, 349—50 (p.350), *PS*, p.316 (W.209).
- 41 'Pure English', *TLS*, 3 May 1923, p.294 (W.211).
- 42 'A Book of Words', *TLS*, 1 June 1922, p.350, *PS*, p.316 (W.209).
- 43 *CH*, p.605, note to No.302.
- 44 *Early One Morning*, pp. 473, 470.
- 45 See, for example, Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (Oxford, 1930), p.94: 'The music sometimes "seems" to quiver with the void rather than with peace . . . too removed, too thin, too empty, for our enjoyment'.
- 46 *L'Œuvre*, p.207.
- 47 See respectively: *Walter de la Mare* (1960), p.16; *Tribute*, p.86. See Appendix I, nos. 12—17 (on Words).

(4) CRAFTSMANSHIP AND HARD WORK

- 48 'Poetry in Prose', Warton Lecture on English Poetry, British Academy 1935, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 21 (1935), *PS*, 80—171 (p.168).
- 49 *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.474.
- 50 *Chardin: (1699—1779)*, The Faber Gallery, with an introduction and notes by Walter de la Mare (1948), p.4. For interest, see de la Mare's poem 'Still Life', *CP*474, which appeared in his notes on Plate 9, 'Still-Life with Bread', p.20.
- 51 'The Flower of the Mind', *TLS*, 27 September 1917, p.463 (W.171).

(5) CONCISION, SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY

- 52 'An Easter Anthology', *TLS*, 4 April 1912, 133—34 (p.133) (W.45).
- 53 'The English Lyric', *TLS*, 2 October 1913, p.406 (W.64).
- 54 'For Remembrance', *TLS*, 14 February 1918, p.79 (W.174).
- 55 See 'The Sea's Anthology', *TLS*, 13 August 1914, p.385 (W.89).
- 56 *Tea*, p.73.
- 57 *CH*, page xxxiii.
- 58 See respectively: *Twentieth-Century Literature: 1901—1950* (1928), twelfth edition (1956), p.181; Review of 'Before Dawn: a Ballad of Christmas' by de la Mare, *TLS*, 25 December 1924, p.887; and W. J. Smith, 'Master of Silences: Walter de la Mare 1873—1956', *Poetry*, 91 (November 1957), 112—116 (p.112).

- 59 *TLS*, 1 January 1920, p.6 (W.200). De la Mare would probably have agreed with John Holloway who said that most people have now (1956) reacted against the 'cult of unlimited complexity', 'The New "Establishment" in Criticism', *Listener*, 20 September 1956, pp.429—30 (p.430).
- 60 'A Lapidary', *TLS*, 1 May 1919, p.235, *PV*, p.91 (W.180).
- 61 *Tea*, p.57.
- 62 'Donne', *PV*, pp.156—161 (p.159), *Edinburgh Review*, April 1913.
- 63 *CH*, p.602. See, however Bonnerot, *L'Œuvre*, p.425, Note 35, where she seems to have got the impression that de la Mare did not admire Donne.
- 64 'God Keep Me Still', *TLS*, 16 January 1919, p.31 (W.178). See Appendix I, nos. 18—19 (on Concision).

(6) TECHNIQUE

- 65 'After the Wessex Edition', *PV*, pp.28—33 (p.32), *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 1 November 1913.
- 66 *TLS*, 2 October 1913, p.406 (W.64).
- 67 'A Phonetician's View of Verse Structure' in *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics* (Oxford, 1965).
- 68 *Listener*, 14 November 1940, p.702.
- 69 'Poetry in Prose', *PS*, p.100.
- 70 'Vanity of Vanities', *TLS*, 15 July 1915, p.236 (W.124).
- 71 *PS*, p.91.
- 72 'Mr. Freeman's Poems', *TLS*, 13 April 1916, p.174 (W.151).
- 73 '"Helen Redeemed" and "Love Poems"', *TLS*, 13 March 1913, p.108 (W.55).
- 74 *PS*, p.92.
- 75 *PS*, pp. 87, 89, 90.
- 76 'Swinburne and the Babies', *TLS*, 12 December 1918, p.614 (W.176).
- 77 *Tribute*, pp.106—107, x, xi.
- 78 *TLS*, 13 April 1916, p.174 (W.151).

- 79 'In and About War', *TLS*, 24 February 1916, p.91 (W.148).
See Appendix I, nos. 20—26.
- 80 'Mr. Noyes's New Poems', *TLS*, 21 October 1915, p.367 (W.136).
- 81 *TLS*, 4 April 1912, p.133 (W.45).
- 82 See respectively: 'Songs of Honour', *TLS*, 29 May 1919, p.292 (W.182); 'Life Desiring Life', *TLS*, 2 October 1919, p.527 (W.191); 'A Hindu Play', *TLS*, 3 July 1919, p.361 (W.186).
- 83 *TLS*, 24 February 1916, p.91 (W.148).

(7) WAR POETRY

- 84 *TLS*, 1 July 1915, p.217 (W.120).
- 85 'Pax Ventura', *TLS*, 18 May 1916, p.233 (W.154).
- 86 See *L'Œuvre*, p.30 and note (48) on p.422, referring to an unpublished letter from de la Mare to Louis Bonnerot, 29 January 1945.
- 87 See *TLS*, 24 February 1916, p.91 (W.148).
- 88 'Patriotic Poetry', *TLS*, 3 September 1914, pp.405—06 (p.406) (W.91).
- 89 *TLS*, 24 February 1916, p.91 (W.148).
- 90 *TLS*, 3 September 1914, p.405 (W.91).
- 91 CP208; CP598; CP459.
- 92 See respectively: 'The Spirit of Man', *TLS*, 3 February 1916, pp.49—50 (p.49), PV185 (W.146); *Animal Stories*, page xxxv. Compare also: 'Amid the evils . . . of this infamous, devilish, righteous and inevitable war', *Love*, page cxxxvii.
- 93 'Sir Henry Newbolt's Poems', *TLS*, 26 September 1918, p.453 (W.175). It is interesting to note that de la Mare quoted poems by Owen, Rosenberg and Sassoon in his anthologies *Love* and *BTD*.

(8) THE POETRY OF PASSION

- 94 'Richard Middleton', *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).
- 95 See *Love*, page lxx and 'Shakespeare's England', *TLS*, 20 July 1916, pp.337—38 (p.337) (W.161).

- 96 See *BTD*, p.83 and *Love*, pages lxiv, lxviii.
- 97 *Love*, page lxviii.
- 98 *Love*, page cxviii.
- 99 *Love*, page cxi. See Appendix I, no. 28.
- 100 See *BTD*, p.81 and 'Love in Fiction: The Known and the Mystery', *TLS*, 30 October 1913, p.490 (W.68). For further discussion on de la Mare's attitude to love, see Chapter 4, and his Introduction to his anthology *Love*.

(9) CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY POETS

- 101 See *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p.198 (W.82); *TLS*, 20 July 1916, pp. 337—38 (W.161); *PS*, pp.158—164; *PV*, pp.146—168.
- 102 See *PV*, pp. 138—145; pp. 194—200; pp. 104—107; pp.84—89; pp.23—33; pp.95—103 respectively.
- 103 See, for example, his Royal Society of Literature lectures on 'Emily Brontë' (1918), 'John Keats' (1921), 'Christina Rossetti' (1926), 'Lewis Carroll' (1930) and 'Edgar Allan Poe' (1933). The latter poet figures in de la Mare's short story 'A Revenant' in *Wind Blows Over*, pp.185—234.
- 104 De la Mare mentions Edith Sitwell in *TLS*, 9 December 1915, p.456 (W.140) and, in a review of *The Little Book of Modern Verse*, he commented that there was nothing from Robert Frost 'a poet of unquestionable originality', nor from Ezra Pound, *TLS*, 20 August 1914, p.394 (W.90). The lack of reviews by him on the more modern poets does not mean that he was uninterested in them. His anthologies, *Love*, *BTD*, and *CH* include extracts from the works of, for example, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender and Edwin Muir.
- 105 See respectively: *TLS*, 19 March 1914, p.138; *TLS*, 2 July 1914, p.316; *TLS*, 1 July 1915, p.217 (W.77; W.86; W.120).
- 106 In a general pronouncement on poetry in one of his regular reviews of 'Current Literature' written for *The Edinburgh Review*, de la Mare remarked that he felt we cannot give a verdict on living writers; 'Only the rarest poetry survives the passing day', but still 'so long as their poetry renews in us the sense of life and beauty, restores mystery to what custom has staled, sets heart and mind free awhile from the darkness and difficulties of a jaded world, we can put away our tapes and scales', *Edinburgh Review*, 219 (April 1914), p.422, no.5.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

- 107 For de la Mare's reviews of Edward Thomas's work, see: 'Rest and Unrest', *TLS*, 10 March 1910, p.82 (W.23); 'The Dreams of Men', *TLS*, 18 October 1917, p.502 (W.173), *PV*, pp.119—22; 'In the Perpetual Yesterday', *TLS*, 3 January 1919, p.7 (W.177); 'Edward Thomas', *PV*, pp.114—119, *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 28 April 1917; see also de la Mare's Foreword to Edward Thomas's *Collected Poems* (1920). The quotation is to be found in *PV*, 118.
- 108 For reviews of W. H. Davies, see: 'Two Poets', *TLS*, 8 June 1916, p.269, *PV*, pp.135—137 (W.157); *TLS*, 6 November 1913, p.506, *PV*, pp.134—135 (W.69); 'Georgian Poetry', *PV*, pp.123—133 (p.129), *Edinburgh Review*, April 1913.
- 109 For comments on Rupert Brooke, see: *PV*, p.131; 'A Peace Unshaken', *TLS*, 22 July 1915, p.244 (W.125); 'Thoughts by England Given', *TLS*, 11 March 1915, p.85 (W.107); the quotation is from *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, *PS*, pp.172—199 (p.181); note that this sentence differs very slightly from the original lecture (1919), p.15.
- 110 For comments on Ralph Hodgson, see: 'The Poems of Ralph Hodgson', *TLS*, 7 October 1915, p.342 (W.135); 'Current Literature', *Edinburgh Review*, 219 (April 1914), p.421, no.5.
- 111 For Wilfrid Gibson, see: *PV*, p.130; 'A Lonely Road', *TLS*, 15 October 1914, pp.459—60 (W.98).
- 112 For John Freeman, see: *TLS*, 13 April 1916, p.174 (W.151); 'To the Heavenly Power', *TLS*, 27 March 1919, p.162 (W.179).
- 113 For James Elroy Flecker, see: 'Spell-Swept Rhyme', *TLS*, 27 May 1915, p.177 (W.115); 'James Elroy Flecker', *TLS*, 28 September 1916, pp.457—58, *PV*, pp.73—83 (W.165).
- 114 For D. H. Lawrence, see: *TLS*, 13 March 1913, p.108 (W.55); *PV*, p.127.
- 115 For Walt Whitman, see: *TLS*, 26 February 1914, pp.97—98 (W.76); *TLS*, 1 April 1915, pp.105—06 (W.110).
- 116 For Alice Meynell, see: 'Not Sounds but Silences', *TLS*, 29 May 1913, p.231 (W.58); *TLS*, 27 September 1917, p.463 (W.171); 'Without Misgiving', *TLS*, 2 July 1914, p.318, *PV*, pp.230—232 (W.87); 'Current Literature', *Edinburgh Review*, 218 (1913), pp.194—95, no.9.
- 117 For Thomas Hardy, see: *TLS*, 27 November 1919, pp.681—82 (W.196), *PV*, pp.95—103; 'A Study of Hardy', *TLS*, 6 February 1913, p.50 (W.53); 'The Dynasts', *PV*, pp.23—27, *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (1910); 'After the Wessex Edition', *PV*, pp.28—33, *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 1 November 1913.
- 118 For Alfred Noyes, see: 'A Classic Sing-Song', *TLS*, 5 June 1913, p.243 (W.59); *TLS*, 21 October 1915, p.367 (W.136).

- 119 For John Masefield, see: 'Mr. Masefield's New Poems', *TLS*, 1 October 1914, p.441 (*W*.96); *TLS*, 7 September 1916, p.427 (*W*.163).
- 120 For Thomas Sturge Moore, see: 'A Victorian Georgian', *TLS*, 30 April 1914, p.208 (*W*.83).
- 121 For Richard Middleton, see: 'An Aftermath', *TLS*, 2 January 1913, p.3 (*W*.52); *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (*W*.47).
- 122 For Laurence Binyon, see: 'The Torch', *TLS*, 11 December 1913, pp.601—02 (*W*.71).
- 123 For James Stephens, see: 'Singing of Mount Abora', *TLS*, 25 March 1915, p.101 (*W*.109); *PV*, p.128.
- 124 For Lascelles Abercrombie, see: *PV*, pp.126—27, 130—131; *TLS*, 20 March 1914, p.138 (*W*.77); *TLS*, 11 March 1915, p.85 (*W*.107).
- 125 For Gordon Bottomley, see: *PV*, pp.132—33.

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CHAPTER 3

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE IN RELATION TO POETRY:
FROM HIS CRITICAL AND OTHER PROSE WRITINGS

- * Walter de la Mare, Foreword to Martin Johnson, *Art and Scientific Thought: Historical Studies towards a Modern Revision of their Antagonism* (1944), p.1 [sic].

(1) INSPIRATION

- 1 'Mr. Gibson's New Poems', *TLS*, 6 April 1916, p.162 (W.150).
- 2 'Digby Mackworth Dolben', *TLS*, 21 December 1911, 529—30 (p.530) (W.43).
- 3 'Some Women Novelists', *Pleasures and Speculations*, 233—69 (p.239).
- 4 'Meredith's Early Poetry', *TLS*, 24 February 1910, p.63 (W.21).
- 5 'New Lamps for Old', *TLS*, 6 November 1913, p.506 (W.69).
- 6 'Pall Mall and Paraguay', *TLS*, 26 October 1916, p.511 (W.168).
- 7 See respectively:
 - (i) 'The Torch', *TLS*, 11 December 1913, 601—02 (p.601) (W.71).
 - (ii) 'Poets of 1915', *TLS*, 30 December 1915, p.496 (W.141).
 - (iii) 'The Nineteenth Century', *TLS*, 6 January 1916, p.6 (W.143).
 - (iv) 'Poetry in Prose', *PS*, 80—171 (p.157).
 - (v) *Love*, p.cxxxiv. In a footnote to p.cxxxix, in which de la Mare gave strong praise to Keats, he quoted Kant: 'Whatever can be taught and learnt is not the work of genius'. See also Appendix I, nos. 29—33.
- 8 *Chardin*, p.2.
- 9 A. E. Housman quoted this in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, pp.38—39.
- 10 'A Study of Hardy', *TLS*, 6 February 1913, p.50 (W.53).

(2) IMAGINATION

- 11 *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.14 (*PS*, p.180). Compare: 'If the imagination die, what bearable solitude will be left for man?', *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).
- 12 'The Supernatural in Nature', *TLS*, 6 November 1919, 617—18 (p.617) (W.193).

- 13 See *Private View*, pp. 251—56 (W.214).
- 14 'The Story of This Book', *Come Hither*, pp. xxii—xxiii.
- 15 CP347—353, xxxiv.
- 16 'Afoot in England', *TLS*, 1 July 1909, p.244 (W.15); compare: "Not only is it still possible . . . to survey the familiar with eyes as renewed and wonderful as Cortes's . . . but it is dubious if there lives a man in Peckham so diligent as absolutely to have exhausted the solemn and vivid mysteries even of his own backyard', 'The Lure of the Map', *TLS*, 6 May 1920, p.282 (W.206).
- 17 'Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter and Friends', *PV*, pp.247—50 (p.248), *New York Times*, 7 September 1952.
- 18 *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p.88.
- 19 'Walter de la Mare', in *Scrutinies by Various Writers*, collected by Edgell Rickword (1928), pp.41—50 (p.43).
- 20 *Modern English Literature* (Oxford, 1970), p.65.
- 21 *Figures in Modern Literature* (1924), Week-End Library edition, 1928, p.41.
- 22 Introduction to *PV*, p.vi.
- 23 'Three Rogue Poets', Chapter 18 in *Figures in the Foreground: Literary Reminiscences 1917—1940* (1963), p.206.
- 24 *Desert Islands* (1930), third edition (1947). p.33. This observation was first made by de la Mare in his review of *Defoe* edited by John Masefield, 'Daniel Defoe', *TLS*, 11 November 1909, pp. 417—18 (p.417), *PV*, p.51 (W.18).
- 25 *Ibid.*
For further quotations from de la Mare on the subject of Inspiration and Imagination, see Appendix I, nos. 34—38.

(3) THE INWARD EYE

- 26 *BTD*, pp. 51—58 (pp. 51, 54, 55); de la Mare mentions 'the inward eye' also in his Note to No.13 in *CH*, p.501.
- 27 See Foreword to *Art and Scientific Thought*, p.viii, and *CH*, p.507, note to No.23, where de la Mare tells the story of how Blake as a child saw on Peckham Rye a tree full, not of birds, but of angels.
- 28 'Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter and Friends', *PV*, p.250.

(4) THE SEEING EYE

- 29 'In a Glass Darkly', *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (W.170).
30 *Love*, p. liii.
31 *Chardin*, p.24.
32 'The New Letter Writer', *TLS*, 17 February 1916, pp.73—74 (W.147).
33 *Early One Morning*, p.39.
34 'Feodor Sologub', *TLS*, 24 June 1915, p.212 (W.119).
35 'Clayhanger', *TLS*, 15 September 1910, p.328 (W.27).
36 'The Lesson of the Masters', *TLS*, 13 May 1915, p.160 (W.114).
37 'Christina Rossetti', *Essays by Divers Hands, Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*, New Series, 6, edited by G. K. Chesterton (1926), 79—116 (p.111).
38 'A Quiet Life', *Essays by Divers Hands, Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*, New Series, 20, edited by Gordon Bottomley (1943), 63—83 (pp. 64, 75).
39 'Mr. Cunninghame Graham's Short Stories', *TLS*, 9 May 1912, p.191 (W.46).
40 'Pall Mall and Paraguay', *TLS*, 26 October 1916, p.511 (W.168).
41 See respectively: *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.19; 'Walter de la Mare's Short Stories', in *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (1951), 79—83 (p.83).
42 See Chapter 1, p.34 and Note 114. These catalogues may remind one of Rupert Brooke's poem 'The Great Lover', to which de la Mare was no doubt referring when he wrote in *Love* (p. lxxxv): 'One of his richest poems, obviously written *con amore* if not *appassionato*, is devoted to what he *liked*'.
43 *Animal Stories*, p. xix.
44 *L'Œuvre*, p.409. For further quotations on the Inward and the Seeing Eye, see Appendix I, nos. 39—44.

(5) NATURE

- 45 'Poetic Drama: The Mischoice of Theme', *TLS*, 9 October 1913, p.422 (W.65).
46 'The Supernatural in Nature', *TLS*, 6 November 1919, p.617 (W.193).

- 47 'Drum-Taps', *TLS*, 1 April 1915, p.105 (W.110).
48 *EOM*, p. 11.
49 'Life Desiring Life', *TLS*, 2 October 1919, p.527 (W.191).
50 *BTD*, p. 26.
For a more detailed discussion of de la Mare's attitude to Nature, see Chapter 5, pp. 163—176.

(6) REALITY

- 51 See respectively: *Animal Stories*, p. xxix; 'Adagia' (1957), reprinted from *Opus Posthumous*, quoted in *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, edited by James Scully (1966), p.154.
52 *Poetry in the Making* (1967), pp. 123—24.
53 'They were taken in by actualism, not taken captive by a realist. By legerdemain, not by a Prospero. No ostler or dairymaid on chancing to catch sight of this scullery maid would stoop to pick up her brass cauldron with which to water his horses or to go milking. And yet, so vivid can be the impact of its burnished metal on one's mind that days afterwards the mere memory of it may be so enhanced as to dazzle one's inward eye.' De la Mare's notes on 'The Scullery Maid' in *Chardin*, p.10.
54 *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.474.
55 *BTD*, pp.3—4.
56 See *PV*, pp. 55, 255 (W.18, W.214).
57 *PV*, p.97 (W.196).
58 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.19.
59 *Walter de la Mare*, p.154.
60 'Mr. Walter de la Mare', *TLS*, 24 April 1953, p.269.
61 'That extremely open-eyed, unillusioned, keenly practical person — an artist', 'An Aftermath', *TLS*, 2 January 1913, p.3 (W.52); see also: 'Shakespeare Personally', *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p.198 (W.82), and 'Richard Middleton', *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).
62 'A Study of Conrad', *TLS*, 8 June 1916, p.270 (W.158).
63 'A Classic Sing-Song', *TLS*, 5 June 1913, p.243 (W.59).

- 64 *TLS*, 1 July 1909, p.244 (W.15).
- 65 'Current Literature', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol.216 (1912), pp.372—89 (p.382).
- 66 *PV*, p.26.
- 67 *CH*, p.665, note to No. 470.
- 68 'The Personality of Walter de la Mare: A tribute by V. Sackville-West on the occasion of the poet's 80th birthday', *Listener*, 30 April 1953, pp.711—12 (p.712).

(7) DREAM

- 69 See the section entitled 'The Stuff of Dreams' in *BTD* and excerpts from, for example, books by Havelock Ellis, Frederick Greenwood, Henri Bergson, Dr. John Bigelow and Dr. J.Varendonck. De la Mare reviewed Havelock Ellis's *The World of Dreams* in *TLS*, 30 March 1911, p.127 (W.35).
- 70 See 'Making Up', Chapter X in *EOM*, pp.132—42. See Appendix I, no. 47.
- 71 'Troubled Waters', *TLS*, 24 October 1912, p.456 (W.49).
- 72 'In a Glass Darkly', *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (W.170).
- 73 *Tea*, pp. 55, 30.
- 74 See his Introduction to *John Freeman's Letters*, edited by Gertrude Freeman and Sir John Squire (1936), p. viii; *Love*, p. lxx; and *BTD*, p.93.
- 75 See *BTD*, p.92 and *Beginning*, pp.125—49.
- 76 *BTD*, pp.96—97.
- 77 See respectively: 'Thoughts by England Given', *TLS*, 11 March 1915, p.85 (W.107); *BTD*, p.105.
- 78 'God Keep me Still', *TLS*, 16 January 1919, p.31 (W.178).
- 79 *BTD*, p.56.
- 80 *Tea*, p.15.
- 81 *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.7 (PS, p.176). See also Appendix I, nos. 45—47.

(8) CHILDHOOD

- 82 *Love*, pp. lv, lvi.
- 83 *TLS*, 6 April 1933, p.245 (W.213).
- 84 *Sun Before Seven*, Written and Illustrated by Ian Dall, with a Foreword by Walter de la Mare (1936), pp. vii, xiii, xvi.
- 85 Anon., 'More of Traherne', *TLS*, 3 November 1910, p.423.
- 86 *Sun Before Seven*, p. viii.
- 87 'Happy Those Early Days', *TLS*, 6 April 1933, p.245 (W.213).
- 88 See *CH*, p.xxxv and *TLS*, 2 January 1913, p.3 (W.52).
- 89 *EOM*, p.72.
- 90 'Semper Admirari', *TLS*, 12 January 1911, p.12 (W.32).
- 91 See Chapter 1, Note 36 and also the list 'Children's Books in Poetry and Prose' under the heading 'Walter John de la Mare' in *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, edited by I. R. Willison, Vol. 4, 1900—1950 (1972), pp.258-59. According to Mr Richard de la Mare, one of Walter de la Mare's four children, he was a much beloved father (see Appendix II).
- 92 *Sun Before Seven*, p. viii.
- 93 See 'To the Heavenly Power', *TLS*, 27 March 1919, p.162 (W.179).
- 94 'Richard Middleton', *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).
- 95 *EOM*, pp. 21, 28.
- 96 'Hans Christian Andersen', *TLS*, 1 January 1914, pp.1—2 (p.1) *PS*, pp.14—23 (W.72).
- 97 See respectively: *Wind Blows Over*, pp.91—101; *Riddle*, pp. 69—89 and pp.1—37. Compare also his poems: 'The Funeral', *CP*44—45 and 'Dry August Burned', *CP*365, and see Chapter 4 (d), p.128.
- 98 *EOM*, p.85.
- 99 'Swinburne and the Babies', *TLS*, 12 December 1918, p.614(W.176).
- 100 *EOM*, p.86.
- 101 See *TLS*, 1 January 1914, pp.1—2, *PS*, pp.15, 19 (W.72).

- 102 See respectively: *Riddle*, pp.1—37; *Beginning*, pp.76—95; *Riddle*, pp.69—89; *Wind Blows Over*, pp.91—102; *Beginning*, pp.60—75; *On the Edge*, pp.309—32.
- 103 *TLS*, 30 May 1912, p.224 (W.47).
De la Mare discussed childhood, the qualities of the child and the poet and childhood in an article referred to by Russell Loines in a letter dated 10 March 1917: see typescript of 'On Childhood' in University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Provisional List, Walter de la Mare Manuscripts, Typescripts and Associated Material, Deed Box A, Box 10, 'Oddments in Prose' (hereafter Bodleian A,10). On page 2 of this article he wrote: 'By sheer hard effort and taking pains we can in some degree so live into the minds and hearts of children as all but to be momentarily children again'. See also Appendix I, nos. 48—49.

(9) SOLITUDE AND EXILE

- 104 *EOM*, Chapter II, pp.15—28 (p.15).
- 105 *Love*, p. civ. See also p. xcix.
- 106 See *Desert Islands*, Note to p.56 'Unbroken solitude', pp.251—253 (p.252).
- 107 See respectively: *Broomsticks*, pp.137—74; *On the Edge*, pp.285—308; *Connoisseur*, pp.1—44. See also the poems: 'Myself', CP96—97; 'The Phantom', CP33—35; 'The Ghost', CP196—97; 'Outer Darkness', CP492—94, for example.
- 108 'Dream and Wake', *TLS*, 30 December 1915, p.498 (W.142).
- 109 'James Elroy Flecker', *TLS*, 28 September 1916, pp.457—58 (p.457), *PV*, pp.73—83 (p.75) (W.165).
- 110 This is the opening sentence of *Apostate* (1926); see *Listener*, 14 November 1940, pp.701—702 (p.702).

(10) LIFE AND TIME

- 111 'The Spirit of Man', *TLS*, 3 February 1916, pp.49—50 (p.49), *PV*, pp.185—93 (p.186) (W.146).
- 112 *TLS*, 28 September 1916, p.457, *PV*, p.75 (W.165).
- 113 'The Modern Andromeda', *TLS*, 29 March 1917, p.149 (W.169).
- 114 *TLS*, 3 February 1916, p.50, *PV*, p.191 (W.146).
- 115 'Quarks, Quasars and the Meaning of Life', *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 7 August 1983, p.7.

- 116 See Chapter 5 (e) and (f) for further discussion on this matter.
- 117 'Things Not Seen', *TLS*, 7 August 1913, p.328 (W.61).
- 118 'The Mask of Transiency', *TLS*, 12 June 1919, p.323 (W.183),
and *BTD*, p.4. Compare 'The Monologue', CP239.
- 119 *WCh.*, CP563, vi.

(11) DEATH

- 120 See 'Shadow', CP66, iii:
The loveliest thing earth hath, a shadow hath,
A dark and livelong hint of death,
Haunting it ever till its last faint breath . . .
- 121 *Tea*, p.49.
- 122 *BTD*, p.106.
- 123 *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p.198 (W.82).
See Chapter 4 (j) and Chapter 5 (b), pp.151—53.
- 124 *The Traveller* , CP514, ix; CP516, ix.
- 125 'The New Letter Writer', *TLS*, 17 February 1916, pp.73—74
(p.73) (W.147).
- 126 See 'The Bottle', CP288—89, vii;
'Poets and Puritans', *TLS*, 23 September 1915, p.319 (W.133).
- 127 *BTD*, p.108; compare Hebrews 10. 1: 'For the law having a
shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the
things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered
year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.'
- 128 'An Easter Anthology', *TLS*, 4 April 1912, pp.133—34 (p.134)
(W.45).
- 129 'Truths or Truisms', *TLS*, 6 July 1911, p.252 (W.38).
For further quotations from de la Mare on the subject of
death, see Appendix I, nos. 50—51.

CHAPTER 4

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE: FROM HIS POEMS. I

- * Walter de la Mare, *TLS*, 13 March 1913, p.108 (W.55);
Gottfried Benn, *Probleme der Lyrik* (Wiesbaden, 1951),
10. Auflage, 1969, p.22.

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1 See discussion of the story 'The Riddle' in Chapter 7 (4).
- 2 Lord David Cecil C.H., *Walter de la Mare*, Presidential Address 1973, The English Association (July 1973), p.7.
- 3 'Poetry in Walter de la Mare', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), 69—81 (p.75).
- 4 See *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p.81 and compare what de la Mare said in 'Francis Thompson': 'Of the inmost life of Francis Thompson his own work is the clearest and most infallible, and yet narrow, revelation. His poetry reveals not only what he himself thought and felt most consistently and intensely, but reveals it also in relation to what he considered to be of the deepest moment in life', *PV*, pp. 84—89 (p.84), *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 8 November 1913.
- 5 In this connection John Press writes that de la Mare totally ignored the realm of social life and that man is, for him, a Pilgrim, Traveller, Visitant, not a political animal; see 'The Poetry of Walter de la Mare', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, edited by A. Norman Jeffares, Vol. I (University of Calgary, 1970), pp.29—37 (p.32).
- 6 See respectively: CP234, CP235, CP235—36.
- 7 CP281—82, in *The Fleeting* (1933). Compare in the same collection: 'On the Esplanade', CP278; 'The Fat Woman', CP280; 'The Slum Child', CP283—85; 'News', CP285—86, all of which might be termed socially significant poems; and consider the significance of stanza i, 'Tell'st thou no truth of the life that is', in 'The Catechism', CP253.
- 8 In this connection, compare de la Mare's remark in his review 'Mr. Wells's Short Stories': 'He knows to a nicety the texture of a dream, precisely where dream lours into nightmare. He knows the magic that lurks in the ultra-usual when the right emotional nerve . . . is tugged or rapped patly and neatly.' *TLS*, 24 August 1911, p.310 (W.40).

- 9 'The Complete Works of Thackeray', *TLS*, 29 June 1911, pp. 241—42 (p.241) (*W.37*), *PV*, pp.41—50.
- 10 See for example: 'The Corner Stone', *CP*245; 'The Snowdrop', *CP*321; 'A Riddle', *CP*255; 'The Miracle', *CP*68.
- 11 *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.21, *PS*, p.186.
- 12 'Labyrinth', *CP*629; this sonnet was printed in *Pall Mall Magazine*, September—December 1902. Compare the title to that of Edwin Muir's poem in his collection of the same name; Muir's vision of two worlds, his themes and preoccupations, have much in common with de la Mare (see Chapter 8 (3)).

(2) LOVE

(a) The Visionary Face

- 13 Compare Keats's 'Bright Star' and Shelley's 'sustaining love' in *Adonais*, liv.
- 14 Compare this poem 'Epigram' by Dowson with de la Mare's poem 'Twilight', *CP*307.
- 15 This description is from de la Mare's unpublished poem 'The Revenant', *CP*704—708, ii. Compare *Love*, p. li, where he calls love 'the beloved image, that haunting wraith'.
- 16 It is only necessary to read *Behold This Dreamer* and, in this connection, the section entitled 'Animus and Anima', to see de la Mare's interest in the study of psychology.
- 17 'It is said that every man of genius shares the hospitality of his heart with a woman and a child', wrote de la Mare in 'Christina Rossetti', p.115.
- 18 See, for example, the poems: 'The Phantom', *CP*33; 'The Sleeper', *CP*105; 'The Keys of the Morning', *CP*106; 'The Owl', *CP*329—45; and the stories, 'What Dreams may Come' (Emmeline), and 'Cape Race' (Lettie) in *Wind Blows Over*; 'The Looking Glass' (Alice) and 'Selina's Parable' (Selina) in *Riddle*; 'The Face' (Nora) and 'The Picture' (Lucia) in *Beginning*; 'Broomsticks' (Miss Chauncey) 'Lucy' and 'Maria-Fly' in *Broomsticks*.
- 19 See H. L. Mencken, *Selected Prejudices, Second Series*, first published in various volumes, 1922—1927, 'The Old Subject' (IV), i; 'Free and Foolish', in *The Travellers' Library* (1927), 1932 edition, p.74.

- 20 See respectively: *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (1910), reprinted as *The Three Royal Monkeys or The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (1935) and *The Three Royal Monkeys* (1946); CP226—28; CP219—224; CP496; and compare 'It is a Wraith', CP627 and 'The Son of Melancholy', CP248—49.
- 21 Compare the fairy-tale aspect of de la Mare's story 'The Lovely Myfanwy' in *Broomsticks*, pp.261—304, and his poems: 'The Sleeping Beauty', CP35; 'The Sleeper', CP299; 'Gold', CP251; 'Maerchen', CP251; 'Outer Darkness', CP492—94.
- 22 *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge, 1975).
- 23 See, for example, the reviews by Sally Brompton of *Faeries*, by Brian Froud and Alan Lee, *The Leprechaun's Kingdom*, *Miracles and Magic*, *The Vanishing People*, and *A Dictionary of Fairies*, by Dr Katharine Briggs, and *Gnomes* by Wil Huygen, in *The Daily Mail* (Books Page), 5 April 1979.
- 24 Interestingly enough Barfield, when refuting this criticism of de la Mare, quotes Tolkien's phrase in his essay on *Fairy Stories*: 'the parrot-cry of escapism', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), p.74.
- 25 *Art and Scientific Thought*, pp.11,71.
- 26 'A Portrait', CP453—54, xi.
- 27 *Animal Stories*, p.xv.
- 28 'An Irish Anthology', *TLS*, 16 December 1909, pp.489—90 (p.489) (W.19).
- 29 See *Animal Stories*, p.xv.
- 30 Frederick T. Wood, 'On the Poetry of Walter de la Mare', *Poetry Review*, 24 (1933), pp.91—114 (p.92).
- 31 CP3. De la Mare showed his admiration for and interest in Shakespeare by his introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Scholar's Library Edition (1935), reprinted in *PS*, pp.270—305, an essay admired by the Shakespearian scholar, J. Dover Wilson in *Tribute*, pp.25—42; and by his introduction to *The Shakespeare Songs: being a complete collection of the songs written or attributed to William Shakespeare*, edited by Tucker Brooke (1929).
- 32 See respectively: CP20—23; CP14—15; CP24—26; CP7. De la Mare was interested in children's singing game rhymes and jingles; he had read Lady Alice Gomme's *Traditional Games*, which he mentioned in *CH*, pp.516—17, Note to No.41.

- 33 *TLS*, 24 June 1915, p.212 (W.119).
- 34 See quotations from MacDonald in *Love*, Nos. 139, 360, and *EOM*, p.92.
- 35 De la Mare retold the story of 'Cinderella and the Glass Slipper' and other well-known fairy tales in *Told Again* (1927). Compare too his own story 'Alice's Godmother' in his *Collected Stories for Children* (1947), where Alice's many-times-great-grandmother celebrates her 350th birthday.
- 36 See respectively: *Lilith*, Chapters 15, 20, 24—27; *Phantastes*, Chapters 19, 13, and 16. Compare de la Mare's poem 'Decoy', CP252, v: 'A thousand cheating names hath she'.
- 37 George MacDonald, *A Hidden Life* (1857).
- 38 CP501—16 and CP188. See discussion of 'The Song of Finis' in Chapter 7 (3), and note in stanza i 'His armour red and thin with rust'.
- 39 'There, O thou Shadow forlorn,/ Is the wraith of thee, I', CP250, i.
- 40 The strange, symbolic land of *Lilith* is reached through the non-reflecting mirror in the garret on the top floor (Chapter 2) — compare *Alice Through the Looking-glass*; in Chapter 3, Mr Raven says: 'All the doors you had yet seen . . . were doors in; here you came upon a door out.' In *Lilith*, Chapter 31, Mr Raven says: 'Take the horse and ride to failure', which is perhaps echoed by the worn-out mare in de la Mare's *The Traveller*. The journey in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* has also much in common with the journey which Tangle and Mossy make, by forest, valley, icy mountain, desert, lake, precipice, underground stream and cave, in *The Golden Key*; and Anodos's boat journey in *Phantastes* (Chapter 10).
- 41 Chapter 8 on 'Love', *Walter de la Mare: A Study of his Poetry*, p.111 and p.110.
- 42 See de la Mare's discussion on Sex and Love in *Love*, pp.1 and lxviii. See also Chapter 2 (8) of this thesis.
- 43 *Selected Prejudices*, pp.77—78.
- 44 *Beginning*, p.206.
- 45 p. lxxix. Note the majestic rhythm of de la Mare's prose in this passage.
- 46 *L'Œuvre*, p.151.
- 47 See *Love*, pp. lxviii, lvii, lxxvii.

- 48 See 'I Became an Author', *Listener*, 8 September 1938, p.474.
- 49 "'Helen Redeemed" and "Love Poems"', *TLS*, 13 March 1913, p.108 (W.55). Compare 'The Kiss', CP547—48.
- 50 De la Mare wrote of D. H. Lawrence's art and naked sincerity in the review of his *Love Poems and Others* in *TLS*, 13 March 1913, noted above. John Press wrote that de la Mare had favourably reviewed Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, although the review was not published, *Ariel*, I (1970), p.36.
- 51 For the short stories, see respectively: *On the Edge*, pp. 201—46; *Riddle*, pp.1—37; *Beginning*, pp.176—216; *On the Edge*, pp.117—200. There are many poems in CP which show that de la Mare understood the problems of love: see 'Here', CP523; 'Not One', CP488; 'Not Yet', CP489; 'Belated', CP520; 'Unmeant', and 'She Said', CP521; 'No, No, No!', CP601; 'Intermittent Fever', CP602; 'The Enigma', CP603; 'When Love Flies In', CP606, etc. See also his phrase about lost love: 'Not exactly "forget," though — but remember; with all the hopelessness, the helpless burning and longing gone,' in 'Benighted', *Ding Dong Bell*, p.39. In his essay *Christina Rossetti*, he also wrote that she knew love, renunciation, pain, misery, loss and death, and we cannot appreciate her poetry unless 'we have first made sharp acquaintance with these things ourselves' (p.100).
- 52 See *Love*, p. cxiii, and 'Love in Fiction: The Known and the Mystery', *TLS*, 30 October 1913, p.490 (W.68).
- 53 *Love*, pp. cxli, cxliii; de la Mare quoted many authors who say that there is nothing real in the world but love, including the old Chinese sage, Mencius who said that 'to lack love is to lack wisdom', and Nietzsche who thought that love is 'the dominant, if secret, incentive of Art', *Love*, p.cx.
- 54 Compare: 'But in poetry, as in fiction, it is prudent not to be too prodigal of the sensuous and amorous . . . it soon clogs', *Love*, p. cxxvii, and: 'The chief fault of the minor poet is that he informs us of his emotions, he does not make us share them', Anon., 'Minor Poetry', *TLS*, 25 November 1920, p.772. See Chapter 2 (8); 'Lost', CP714.
- 55 CP473; CP453—54.
- 56 See respectively: CP198; CP491; CP496; CP196—97.
- 57 Compare 'Betrayal', CP198 and 'She Said', CP521.
- 58 See, for example, 'She', CP623, and *Love*, p. xci.

- 59 *Ariel*, 1 (1970), p.35.
'The Ghost', CP196—97 is one of the most anthologised of de la Mare's poems: it is No.6 in Bonnerot's survey of his poems in anthologies from 1925 to 1960, coming after 'The Listeners', 'The Moth', 'Fare Well', 'The Song of the Mad Prince' and 'Napoleon', see *L'Œuvre*, Notes to 'Introduction', p.417 (7). The poem has been much admired by critics and has been the subject of critical analysis by, amongst others, Leavis (*New Bearings in English Poetry*, 1932, Chapter 2), Press (see Note above), and Donald A. Stauffer (*The Nature of Poetry*, New York, 1946, Chapters 6 and 7).
See Chapter 9 (3a) for further discussion of this poem.
- 60 De la Mare admired King's 'The Exequy' and quoted it in *Love*, remarking that it would always survive (p. lxxx, No.635).
- 61 Consider, for instance, Hardy's poems, 'The Haunter' and 'The Voice'. Robert Langbaum suggests that Hardy is a minor poet because he makes his points completely with a pat remark to end his poems, whereas major poetry 'gives the impression of unfathomed depths', 'Hardy, Frost, and the Question of Modernist Poetry', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 58 (Winter, 1982), pp.69—80 (p.79). In this regard, an interesting point to consider might be whether de la Mare's serious poems are more ambiguous and less 'pat' than Hardy's.
- 62 See *CH*, pp.415—46 and note on p.644 to No.412, 'Brown Robyn'.
- 63 'A Woman's Genius', *TLS*, 22 January 1914, p.33 (W.74).
Compare 'life's twilight window' here with 'The Revenant', CP199, i:
Toward the dark of this old window lift not up your smiling faces,
Where a Shade stands forlorn from the cold of the earth.

(b) The Romantic Love Lyric
- 64 For other poems of this type, see: 'Not One', CP488; 'She Said', CP521; 'She', CP623; 'Foreboding', CP624; the poignant little epitaph, 'O Onlie One, Fare-well!', CP755; and the poems from the story 'The Green Room', CP763—69. De la Mare admired Emily Brontë whose 'Remembrance' (quoted by him in *Love*, No.631) may be compared with the last stanza of his 'The Revenant', CP199.
- 65 De la Mare described Christina Rossetti's outlook as personal and emotional, *Christina Rossetti*, p.83.
- 66 Dowson in a letter to Arthur Moore (1890) quoted from Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*: 'For there is a certain grief in things as they are, in man as he has come to be, as he certainly is, over and above those griefs of circumstance which are in a measure removable — an inexplicable shortcoming or misadventure on the part of nature itself — death and old age as it must

needs be, and that watching of their approach, which makes every stage of life like a dying over and over again.' *The Letters of Ernest Dowson*, edited by Desmond Flower and Henry Maas (1967), p.145.

- 67 See 'Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration', iv. See also Dowson's 'Vilanelle of Sunset', 'Benedictio Domini' and 'Carthusians', and compare Wordsworth's 'the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world', and Keats's 'The weariness, the fever, and the fret'.
- 68 'Seraphita', i. See also Dowson's 'Terre Promise', 'Flos Lunae' and 'Impenitentia Ultima'. De la Mare's favourite image of the face or vision is further discussed in Chapter 8 (5).
- 69 De la Mare quoted this poem in *Love*, No.350, and also mentioned it in the Introduction, p. xlvi.
- 70 See Dowson's 'Sonnets of a Little Girl'; he was in love with a young girl, Adelaide Foltinowicz, and his idealisation of her is reflected in his poetry.
- 71 In his *Art Poétique* Verlaine set forth his precept: 'De la musique avant toute chose'. Frank Kermode calls Dowson the nearest thing in England to Verlaine in 'Amateur of Grief', *New Statesman*, 7 June 1963, p.866.
- 72 Dowson published *Verses* in 1896, *Decorations: in Verse and Prose* in 1899 and died in 1900, aged only thirty-three. De la Mare's first book of verse, *Songs of Childhood*, was published in 1902.
- 73 See his *Essay on English Metrical Law* (1857) and compare Gottfried Benn: 'Das Wort faszinierend ansetzen, das können Sie, oder das können Sie nicht', *Probleme der Lyrik*, p.23.
- 74 Goethe's phrase was quoted by Victor Plarr in *Ernest Dowson: Reminiscences* (New York, 1914), p.57; see Ernest Rhys, *Everyman Remembers* (1931), p.89; A. E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933), pp. 46, 47.
- 75 Josephine Miles writes: 'The poetry of the late nineteenth century often called decadent, was structurally not only a falling off from old sublimities, but also a building up, a return from romantic extremes to poise and equilibrium with the renewed aid of classical models.' *Eras and Modes in English Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), p.145.
- 76 'An Epitaph' is No. 17 in Bonnerot's list of de la Mare's most anthologised poems (see Note 59). In this context of the utterly simple poem which yet arouses in the reader, in Winifred Nowottny's phrase, a 'linguistic excitement' (p.221,

The Language Poets Use, 1962), de la Mare's epitaphs in *Ding Dong Bell* must be mentioned, and also that tiny but moving poem, 'Napoleon', CP89:

'What is the world, O soldiers?
It is I:
I, this incessant snow,
This northern sky;
Soldiers, this solitude
Through which we go
Is I.'

See also 'Here Sleeps', CP392.

(c) The Literary Love Lyric

- 77 See respectively: CP394, CP606, CP649, CP602.
For further discussion of Dowson, see the present writer's 'The Poetry of Ernest Dowson: A Brief Reappraisal' (unpublished dissertation for M.A. degree, University of Edinburgh, 1977).
- 78 De la Mare quoted Beaumont's poem in *CH*, No. 285. Compare also, 'The Quarry', CP192; 'In Vain', CP67—68; 'The Captive', CP301.
- (d) His Broad Approach to Love
- 79 'Two Books of Verse', *TLS*, 15 June 1916, p.282 (W.159).
- 80 *Tea*, p.61.
- 81 See *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, p.249.
- 82 See respectively: *Riddle*, pp.1—37; *Wind Blows Over*, pp. 91—102. See Chapter 3 (8).
- 83 Anon., 'Children and Poetry', *TLS*, 11 December 1919, pp.721—22.
- 84 Preface to *Love*, pp. v—vi.
- 85 *L'OEuvre*, p.143.
- 86 Preface to *Love*, p. vi.
- 87 See p. xxxvi.
De la Mare's *Rhymes and Verses* (1944) also contains a section entitled 'All Creatures Great and Small'. He loved little things. He had a hobby of collecting minute objects hardly to be seen with the naked eye, and used to do swaps with Mrs Chesterton (G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p.285). He also preferred tiny music and small churches (*Tea*, pp.28,97). See also 'A Portrait', CP453, ii.

- 88 See respectively: Extract from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in *Love*, No.100; Plato's *Symposium*, *Love*, No.673. Compare: 'Even a chance and unexpected glimpse of these [flowers] may recall for a moment a phantom of that lost visionary beauty.' De la Mare, 'Flowers and Poetry', *PS*, p.211.

(e) Love of Nature

- 89 See *Animal Stories*, p. xli, and CP171, CP139.
- 90 CP365. In *Animal Stories*, p. xli, he wrote that he liked to fish; and that we mustn't be sentimental about eating meat, though we should be sad about extinct and hunted animals.
- 91 See respectively: CP173, CP401, CP268.
- 92 *Animal Stories*, pp. xlii, li; compare 'A Portrait', CP453, iii.
- 93 'Lord Wavell said that W.J. had portrayed the horse in *The Traveller* very well. W.J. said he knew nothing about horses, but he became very attached to that one.' *Tea*, p.33.
- 94 See respectively: CP314, CP171, CP268, CP7, CP470, CP321; See also: 'A Hare', CP386, 'A Queen Wasp', CP386, 'Poor Bird', CP411, 'A Goldfinch', CP410, 'Trees', CP180, 'The Flower', CP231, 'A Robin', CP317.
Outside de la Mare's house in Twickenham grew a great plane tree which he loved to look out upon: 'A superb plane tree, a gigantic tree yet one of the utmost grace', as he described it in a letter (22 June 1943) to Miss J.G.Sime, Edinburgh University Library, MS Letters of Walter de la Mare to Miss J.G.Sime, GEN 715/1, nos. 1—38, 6/1. See also *Tea*, p.20, and *WCh.*, CP557, iii, iv.
- 95 *PS*, p.223. 'Flowers and Poetry' was de la Mare's Introduction to Joan Rutter's anthology *Here's Flowers* (1937). Compare de la Mare's poem 'The Daisy', CP384 and the other poems which are printed near it in *Memory*: 'Foreboding' about a sycamore, CP384; 'The Dove', CP385; 'Swallows Flown', CP385; 'A Queen Wasp', CP386; 'A Hare', CP386; 'Rooks in October', CP389, and 'Twice Lovely', about a weed, CP384.
- 96 *PS*, p.216. See Chapter 5 (3e) for further discussion of de la Mare's views on nature.

(f) Love of Children

- 97 See respectively: CP527, CP758, CP754. See also: 'Be Very Quiet', CP751; 'The Chart', CP467; 'A Child Asleep', CP363; 'Afraid', CP357.
- 98 'And So Good Night', *TLS*, 25 November 1915, p.400 (W.139).

- 99 *Ibid.* (See Note 98).
 - 100 This remark, by Gregory, is quoted in *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement*, edited by Kunitz, p.271.
 - 101 Forrest Reid remarked about 'The Keys of the Morning', CP106: 'Nothing Mr. de la Mare has written, I think, produces quite so extraordinary an effect of mingled fantasy and homeliness', *Walter de la Mare*, p.154.
 - 102 See: *EOM*, p.172; *Tea*, p.31; *WCh*.CP590, iv—vii. His love for his mother is expressed in 'To my Mother', CP99.
 - 103 See also 'Memory', CP373: 'Some fear or woe when I was four'.
 - 104 See his short stories, particularly: 'An Ideal Craftsman' in *On the Edge*; 'In the Forest', in *Wind Blows Over*, and 'The Almond Tree' and 'The Bowl', in *Riddle*.
- (g) Love of Friends
- 105 *Tribute*, p.16; *Tea*, p.18.
 - 106 See respectively: CP346—47, CP242—43, CP210.
- (h) Marital Love
- 107 *Walter de la Mare*, p.114. On p.125 Duffin lists 'The Love Poems of Walter de la Mare', as he sees them. In this connection de la Mare himself wrote: 'Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* is indeed the only lyrical and rapturous epic that I know of in English on the theme of married love', *Love*, p. xcix.
 - 108 'An Anniversary', *Beginning*, p.178.
 - 109 See respectively: CP467—68; CP309; CP114; CP73. 'F' was the poet's daughter Florence.
 - 110 See *Love*, pp. xcii—cxi, on 'Marriage'.
 - 111 *Tea*, p.104.
 - 112 *Selected Prejudices*, pp.79—80.
 - 113 *Love*, pp. xcvi—xcvii.
 - 114 *Riddle*, p.5.
 - 115 See respectively: CP114; CP488; CP489; CP489; CP766.
 - 116 See also 'The Widow', CP752.

(i) Romantic Love

117 *Love*, pp. lxxii—lxxiii.

(j) Love in Death and Divine Love

118 *Love*, p. xci.

119 See respectively: *CH*, Note to No. 274, p.596; 'Mr. Freeman's Poems', *TLS*, 13 April 1916, p.174 (*W*.151).

120 *Love*, pp.481—532, contains sections on 'Love in Grief' and 'Love after Death'; *CH*, pp.249—87, 'Like Stars Upon Some Gloomy Grove'; the love poems from 'The Green Room' are in *CP*763—69, and the epitaphs from *Ding Dong Bell*, in *CP*743—59. See also, 'The Bourne' in *BT*D; 'Where?', *CP*115; 'Here Sleeps', *CP*392; 'So it Would Seem', *CP*613—14; 'Life', *CP*203; 'Vigil', *CP*205.

121 See: 'The Corner Stone', *CP*245, iv; 'Never Yet', *CP*614, iv.

122 De la Mare quoted this poem of Vaughan's in *CH*, No.307, pp.283—84.

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CHAPTER 5

HIS VIEWS ON LIFE: FROM HIS POEMS. II

- * Walter de la Mare, 'A Peace Unshaken', Review of Rupert Brooke, *1914 and Other Poems*, *TLS*, 22 July 1915, p.244 (W.125).
Anon., 'Last Words from Mark Rutherford', *TLS*, 15 July 1915, p.236.

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1 For example, Douglas Garman, Randall Jarrell, F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards and William Walsh; see Luce Bonnerot's comments on these critics in *L'Œuvre*, pp.15,330,417—18 (Note 13).
- 2 'The Poetry of Walter de la Mare', *Contemporary Review*, 190 (1956), pp.70—73 (p.73). Noyes was, however, percipient enough to note that de la Mare's later poems take a Hardyesque view of existence.
- 3 See Forrest Reid, *Walter de la Mare*, p.165: 'The altered, deeper note was already struck in *The Listeners*; it is intensified in *Motley*, which came six years later; and in *The Veil* it sounds more persistently still'.
- 4 *L'Œuvre*, p.17; see respectively: *Tribute*, p.16; *Five Novelist Poets of To-day* (1933), p.20. Note also David Cecil: There is 'deeper, more serious significance' in de la Mare than we think, *Tribute*, p.67; and, more recently, David Perkins: 'His full stature has not been generally recognized', *A History of Modern Poetry* (1976), p.179.
- 5 BBC Radio 4, *Kaleidoscope* programme, broadcast 18 May 1978.
- 6 'Flight from Reason', Review of *The Faber Book of Nonsense Verse*, edited by Geoffrey Grigson, *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 March 1979.
- 7 *L'Œuvre*, pp.18, 227.
- 8 *The Poet's Defence* (Cambridge, 1939), p.204.
- 9 Compare Stephen Spender's remark: 'His poems have many corridors and passages which open on to darkneses and nightmare. Childhood purity and innocence are to him one side of a medal on the reverse of which there is certainly evil', *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963), p.162.

(2) HIS QUALITY OF INNOCENCE-IN-EXPERIENCE AND THE
FORMATIVE SOURCES

- 10 'Master of Silences: Walter de la Mare, 1873—1956',
Poetry, 91 (1957), pp.112—116 (p.116).
- 11 See 'Bibliographical Appendix', *CP*, p.891.
- 12 See: *CP*184, ii; *CP*186; *CP*187.
- 13 See de la Mare's *Poetry in Prose*, Warton Lecture on English
Poetry, read 17 July 1935, *Proceedings of the British Academy*,
21 (1935), pp.239—321, *PS*, pp.80—171, where he praises the
art of Shakespeare, *PS*, pp.157—166.
- 14 The willow tree was obviously a potent literary image for de
la Mare; compare John Heywood, 'The Green Willow: 'All a
green willow, willow / All a green willow is my garland', and
Shakespeare, *Othello*, IV. 3. 41: 'The poor soul sat sighing by
a sycamore tree, / Sing all a green willow'. In *EOM*, p.10, he
tells how as a small boy, when hearing or singing Psalm 137,
'He delighted . . . in the green still waters, and the wind-
swayed gilded triangular harps hooked over the pollard willows'.
Compare 'Dust to Dust', *CP*212; the willow appears in many
of his poems, e.g.: 'The Willow', *CP*229; 'Lullay', *CP*467;
'The Song of the Secret', *CP*184; 'The Truth of Things',
*CP*608; *The Traveller*, *CP*514,ii.
- 15 *Walter de la Mare*, p.88; *A History of Modern Poetry*, p.187.
- 16 De la Mare's interest in riddle poems is shown in the Notes to
CH, pp.616—18, and in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, pp.31—32, 204.
- 17 De la Mare quoted this old rhyme in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*,
pp.41—43; in the Introduction (p.18), he wrote: 'And so it
is with old rhymes and all the old tales and poems one cares
for most. Love them once, you love them always'; in his
Introduction to Roger Ingpen's *Nursery Rhymes for Certain
Times* (1946), he said that 'they are a direct short-cut into
poetry itself'.
- 18 This version is taken from 'Nursery Rhymes' in *The Oxford
Dictionary of Quotations* (1941), Revised impression (1948), 533a.
- 19 *Psalms*, 90. 5—6.
- 20 See Sir James George Frazer, F.R.S., F.B.A., *The Golden Bough:
A Study in Magic and Religion* (1922), Abridged edition (1924),
Chapter 45, 'The Corn-mother and the Corn-maiden in Northern
Europe'.

- 21 Act IV. 7. 167, Act V. 1. Compare de la Mare's poems, 'Ophelia' and 'Hamlet', CP59—60.
- 22 Compare Milton, 'Lycidas': 'Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears / And slits the thin-spun life', where Milton seems to have confused the Fates with the Furies. De la Mare obviously knew his Teutonic mythology, as can be seen in *WCh*. CP568, vii: 'Sick unto death must Woden be of Thor; / Deaf Saturn yells at Frig, "We have met before! . . ."'. Note also de la Mare's use of the 'inner companion', the other self, which has much in common with the Scandinavian *fylgja* (the follower, the second), or half-material ego. His early elves, dwarves, giants and witches also reflect Scandinavian mythology (i.e. a real old English tradition, similar to Shakespeare's sources). De la Mare commented on Fairy Tale, Saga and Myths in his Introduction to *Animal Stories*.
- 23 'The Undercurrent', CP491—92. Compare 'Haunted', CP541 and 'The Others', CP542.

(3) HIS ATTITUDE TO RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL FAITH

(a) General

- 24 'Walter de la Mare's Short Stories' in *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* (1951), pp.79—83 (pp.81,83).
- 25 *L'Œuvre*, pp.304—310.
- 26 See extensive footnote in 'Walter de la Mare, Book Reviewer', *Boston University Studies in English*, 1 (1955), p.224; also quoted in his *The Collected Tales of Walter de la Mare* (New York, 1950), Introduction, p.xviii.
- 27 'In a Glass Darkly', *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (W.170).
- 28 *Christina Rossetti*, p.110.
- 29 *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (W.170).
- 30 See also his stories, 'Lispert, Lispert & Vaine' and 'The Tree' in *The Riddle*, pp.178 and 205; 'The Connoisseur' in *Connoisseur*, pp.101—34, in which he points out that earthly possessions are of no importance set against artistic and spiritual values, especially when Death comes.

(b) His Religious Scepticism

- 31 'Walter de la Mare: The Subtleties of Simplicity', in *Our Best Poets English and American* (1924), pp.43—54 (p.43).
- 32 See Appendix II, and 'A Portrait', CP453, viii:
Impatient, volatile, tongue wearying not —
Loose, too: which, yet, thank heaven, was taught to pray.
- 33 'Selina's Parable', *Riddle*, pp.90—96 (pp.94—95, 95—96).
There is perhaps a glimpse of de la Mare himself when he says of Selina: 'For Selina's was a type of mind that cannot but follow things up . . . it was compelled, that is, by sheer natural impulse, to spin queer little stories out of the actual, and even, alas, to moralise' (p.93).
- 34 See Appendix II.
- 35 *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), Chapter 41, pp.280—81.
- 36 Compare his review 'Fragments of Life', *TLS*, 20 January 1916, p.31 (W.145): '"The night is dark, and I am far from home". . . makes us the home-sick children we all once were, and are.'
- 37 Compare 'Theologians' and 'False Gods', CP536; 'The Rift', CP681.
- 38 Compare 'The Blind Boy', CP469—70, v: 'this all-marvellous earth we share! . . .'
- 39 See 'The Riddlers', CP190—91, iii: 'Have we an answer found?', and 'Vain Questioning', CP204—205, i.
- 40 See Chapter 3 (11) and Chapter 4 (2j).
- 41 Compare *WCh*. CP575, iii: 'Yet, even if, dying, we should cease to be'.
- 42 *Love*, p. lxxvii; see also 'Enigmas', CP543, ii:
O from nefarious enigmas freed
Shall all that dies not live at last . . .
- 43 p. xxxii.
- 44 'The Bridge', CP367; See also 'After the Wessex Edition', *PV*, pp.28—33 (p.33): 'So, too, may we; consoled (or pestered) to the end by the dream of immortality'.
- 45 'The Rapids', CP455, ii; compare 'A Portrait', CP453—54, xvi:
A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
Who still at western window stays to win
A transient respite from the latening sky,
And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in.

- 46 It is interesting to note that Forrest Reid compared 'The Old Men' to Yeats's 'The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water' (in *In the Seven Woods*, 1904), *Walter de la Mare*, p.169; note in stanza iii, the phrase 'The ruinous moon', which is a good example of de la Mare's capacity to find an unusual but strongly evocative adjective.
- 47 *Connoisseur*, pp.99—134; in Part 4, Prince Ahmat Naigul, in his encounter with the leper who is Death, is given a speck of dust which his lovely bride finds, on close examination, to bear the imprint of her own face (p.134); compare 'Dreams', CP347—353, xiv: 'Nay, is that Prince of the Dust — a man, / But a tissue of parts, dissectable?'
- 48 *Connoisseur*, p.103. De la Mare was very interested in sleep and dream, as *BTD* shows, and he often equated sleep with death: in his epitaphs he nearly always referred to the dead as sleeping. St. Dusman can be accepted as Death, or Death's messenger on the analogy of Dickens's 'Golden Dustman' (*Our Mutual Friend*, Chapter 11), and the traditional linking of Sleep and Death, e.g. Sir Thomas Browne's 'Sleep is a death'; Shakespeare, who calls sleep 'Death's counterfeit', and Shelley's 'Death and his brother sleep'. Compare *Memoirs of a Midget*: 'Hypnos, Sleep . . . the son of Night and brother of Death' (Chapter 19, p.135), and *Henry Brocken*, where de la Mare described Henry's meeting in the graveyard with Sleep and Death, the two children, so alike at times, and their mother Night (Chapter 12, pp.169—77).
- 49 *BTB*, p.68.
- 50 Note the twice repeated 'even' and 'might', showing his uncertainty.
- 51 Compare: 'What proof has each of either — out of sight?', 'The Others', CP542; *Tea*, p.39, where Brain said that 'all that we perceive is in a sense our own creation' and de la Mare replied: 'We create it, but we do not know if it fits the reality' (p.40); later he remarked: 'What a small cage we live in! Our capacity to grasp anything is so limited, and there is so much of anything that eludes our grasp' (p.42).
- 52 Consider for example *WCh*. CP588, v:
 'Time' sheened the splendour that was Absalom's hair;
 Time stilled the Garden; seduced Judas there;
 Sped the avenging blade for Robespierre;
 Dogged Marx, in reverie drowned, through Bloomsbury Square
and 'Dreams', CP351—52, xxi—xxviii.

(c) Biblical Story and Imagery

- 53 'Surroundings and education may mould and modify, but the inward bent of each one of us is persistent', *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.11, PS, p.178.
- 54 'Some Women Novelists', PS, pp.233—69 (p.238); this was a lecture to the Royal Society of Literature, 'Some Women Novelists of the Seventies', *The Eighteen-Seventies*, edited by Harley Granville-Barker (Cambridge, 1929); compare, 'Those weeds of superstitious fear planted in one's mind when one is young', *Connoisseur*, p.105.
- 55 See *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851—67* (1954), particularly 'Introduction' and 'Epilogue'.
- 56 See, for example: Stoneyhouse in 'Lucy' (*Broomsticks*); 'The House' (*Wind Blows Over*); Montrésor in 'A Recluse' (*On the Edge*); for further discussion, see 'Décors et Demeures', *L'Œuvre*, pp.118—31, and de la Mare's own childhood reminiscences in *EOM*.
- 57 Clark, in *Walter de la Mare* (1960), said that de la Mare was deeply read in the English classics and that he collected folk tales and traditional stories; de la Mare himself, in *The Printing of Poetry*, said that since the age of five he had read 'hundreds upon hundreds of books of poetry . . . I have ranged from *Hey Diddle Diddle* to *The Mysterious Universe*; from *Old King Cole* to selections from the works of Robert Browning' (p.6); *The Printing of Poetry* (1931) was a paper he read before the Double Crown Club, London, on 12th February 1927. See also 'Books', CP775—77; *WCh*.CP577, ix:

Mere fictions? . . . Still, how sweet upon your ear
 Was always, 'Once upon a time, my dear . . . ' —
 Robbing both night and morrow of all fear

and *Memoirs of a Midget* (Chapter Fourteen, p.93): 'Out of the past welled into memory an old ballad my mother had taught me'.
- 58 Compare: 'Of what in the deeps of our sub-conscious we owe to our ancestors only the confidants of Unkulunkulu can be completely aware', *Lewis Carroll* (1932), p.19; 'It is as if memory and consciousness stretched away into the ages, far, far beyond . . . ' *Memoirs of a Midget* (Chapter Forty-Two, p.289).
- 59 *Stories from the Bible* (1929), pp. ix, x; in a letter (5 July 1948) he wrote: 'Believe the Bible or not, it is the sovereign book of the world in wisdom, insight, and imagination, let alone the greatest English masterpiece even as a translation!' MS Letters of Walter de la Mare to Miss J. G. Sime, Edinburgh University Library, GEN 715/1, nos.1—38, 19/2.

- 60 Compare 'The Exile', CP201 and 'The Bribe', CP488—89. There are many other poems where Adam and Eve and Paradise appear: 'All That's Past', CP116; 'A Dream', CP387; 'Snow', CP395; 'The Scarecrow', CP463; 'Dreams', CP353, xxxv; 'Eden', CP269; 'A Riddle', CP255; 'Good-bye', CP238.
- 61 See respectively: 'Goliath', CP83; 'Absalom', CP361; 'The Tryst', CP193—94; 'Dreams', CP351,352,xxi,xxvii; 'Eden', CP 269; 'The Bribe', CP488—89; 'King David', CP169—70 . For de la Mare's interest in angels, for example, see CH, notes to No.457, pp.661—63, where he quotes from Revelation, Poe, Shakespeare and Donne. This awe-ful Angel appears in 'Tom's Angel', CP315—16: 'When, like a giant across the grass, / The flaming angel went.' Compare 'An Angel', CP543.
- 62 Compare also the picture of the Hebraic Lord God Almighty in 'The Scarecrow', CP463, vi:
- Should in the coming nightfall the Lord God,
Goose-challenged, call, 'My Creature, where art *thou*?'
Scarecrow of hate and vengeance, wrath and blood,
What would'st thou answer now?
- 63 *Memoirs of a Midget*, Chapter Twenty-Two, p.152.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p.187.
- 65 These three hymns or prayers for children are printed in the Enlarged Edition of *Songs of Praise*, Nos. 356, 364, 363.
- 66 CP18—20; CP43—44; CP231; CP319.
- 67 'The Supernatural in Nature', TLS, 6 November 1919, pp.617—18 (p.618) (W.193).
- (d) Hardy-esque Theism
- 68 *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830—1870* (1957), see Chapter 1.
- 69 See Mégroz, *Walter de la Mare*: 'His name is top of the school in Class I for the three terms before he left, and among the first three or four scholars for many years preceding his attainment of the premier position' (p.35).
- 70 See Chapter 2 (2).
- 71 Hardy's *Wessex Poems* was published in 1898, though he had been writing poetry from about 1862. In the nineties the Hardys spent the 'summer season' in London. He ended his novel writing in 1894. *Poems of the Past and the Present* was published in 1902 and *The Dynasts*, which de la Mare greatly admired, between 1904 and 1908. Among the many English poets who have acknowledged their admiration for Hardy are: Pound, Graves, Auden, Blunden, Day Lewis, Frost, Betjeman, Lawrence, Larkin, Scannell.

- 72 De la Mare's colloquial poems, however, often have a distinctly Hardyesque air, and some of his later poems have Hardy's plain style. Both used a great variety of stanza forms. In the Hardy style are, for example: 'The Truth of Things', CP608; '"It was the Last Time he was Seen Alive"', CP540; 'The Dunce', CP534—35; 'She Said', CP521; 'The Fat Woman', CP280—81.
- 73 'Walter de la Mare', *Poetry London*, edited by Tambimuttu, reprinted in 5 volumes by Frank Cass (1970), vol. 2 (1943), pp.47—50 (p.47).
- 74 F. E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (1962), originally published in two volumes, 1928 and 1930 (p.224).
- 75 De la Mare denied that Hardy was an atheist as many thought, *Tea*, p.31.
- 76 For further useful discussion on Hardy's belief and unbelief, see T. R. M. Creighton, *Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection* (1974), pp.342—43. On page ix of his Introduction, he writes: 'Religion, its necessity and impossibility, the indispensable-ness but incredibility of the old beliefs, have never been explored more fully or less dogmatically — and in this, as in much else, Hardy's is an essentially "modern" sensibility using traditional forms.'
- 77 Hardy, 'In Tenebris', I, vi.
- 78 Compare de la Mare's nativity poem 'Before Dawn', CP231—32, which shows his liking for the traditional Christmas story.
- 79 See Chapter 2 (9).
- 80 *PV*, p.97.
- 81 *Riddle*, p.301. Compare 'Philip', CP474; 'Eureka', CP479; 'All but Blind', CP171; 'The Catechism', CP253; 'The Candle', CP610.
- 82 Compare *WCh*.CP570, iii—v.
- 83 'Mr. Hardy's Lyrics', *TLS*, 27 November 1919, pp.681—2, *PV*, p.97 (W.196).
- 84 *Riddle*, p.94; compare: 'the Omnipotent, in slumber bound,' in 'The Tryst', CP193—4.
- 85 There is a distinct echo of Browning in these lines; compare 'Saul', XIX.
- 86 'Patriotic Poetry', *TLS*, 3 September 1914, pp.405—06 (W.91). And see his poems 'O Lovely England', CP90; 'The Englishman', CP31—32. Owen Barfield comments at length on the latter poem and says that both poems illustrate a particular quality which de la Mare's verse can evoke, 'the Englishness of England', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), pp.76—81.

(e) God in Nature and the Immanent Presence

- 87 See 'Sotto Voce', CP242—43, in which de la Mare recounts how Thomas taught him the song of the nightingale; he calls him 'rare poet and rarest friend' in *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.37.
- 88 *EOM*, p.7.
- 89 *Chardin*, p.24.
- 90 See Chapter 4, Notes 87 and 94.
- 91 *Tea*, p.33.
- 92 See *CH*, pp. xx and 595; 'Anatomy', CP79; compare T. S. Eliot, 'Whispers of Immortality': 'Webster was much possessed by death / And saw the skull beneath the skin'.
- 93 University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Letters of Edward Thomas to de la Mare, MS Engl.Lett. c.376, p.31 (19.II.08).
- 94 *Ibid.*, p.40.
- 95 See respectively: 'Dreams', CP349, xiv; 'Fare Well', CP218, and compare 'Widen Your Calls', CP713; 'Reconciliation', CP290; 'Youth', CP86; 'Dust', CP500.
- 96 'The Bottle', CP288—89, iii; compare 'Solitude', CP498, where he refers to Man as 'the trespasser'.
- 97 *CH*, pp. x—xii. Compare Mrs. Nature in *Henry Brocken*, p.128 (Chapter 9) and 'the blind enchantress' in 'The House', *Wind Blows Over*, p.183.
- 98 *BTB*, p.67.
- 99 *L'Œuvre*, p.108. Bonnerot studies in detail de la Mare's reaction to the actuality of Nature's beauty, her landscape and her mystery, in her chapter on 'Nature', pp.89—117.
- 100 Stanza iii; this poem is subtitled 'Nature's Indifference'; compare cold nature in 'Neutral Tones' (1867).
- 101 See 'When Israel out of Egypt came', iii and v particularly, which show Housman as atheist but with an emotional desire to believe: 'The heart goes where no footstep may / Into the promised land'. Housman said that he became a deist at 13 and an atheist at 21. Compare de la Mare, 'The Burning Glass', CP461: 'No map shows my Jerusalem'.
- 102 *Chardin*, p.2.

103 'Mr Kempe', *Connoisseur*, pp.3—43 (p.17).

104 See respectively: CP60; CP61; CP62; CP68; CP71; CP91; CP94.

105 See for example:

They told me Pan was dead, but I
Oft marvelled who it was that sang
Down the green valleys languidly
Where the grey elder-thickets hang

'They Told Me', CP61, i.

'It is the voice of Pan you hear,
Crying his sorceries shrill and clear.'

'Sorcery', CP62, i.

She praises God in her beauty and grace.

'The Willow', CP229, ii.

What spirit lures the bindweed's cup

Unfaltering on

'The Miracle', CP68, i.

De la Mare writes about the 'Immanent Will' in 'The Dynasts',
PV, p.25, *Saturday Westminster Gazette* (1910).

106 One might ask if 'the ancient Master' here is God or Pan?

107 Reid, *Walter de la Mare*, p.103.

De Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880—1940* (1951), p.123.

108 De la Mare, writing about Fairy-tales, said that the town-bred
and slow of day-dreaming do not usually believe in fairies; nor
does one who 'has never in the open been out alone with the
dying, star-clustered moon, or been lost in a wood towards dusk',
Animal Stories, p. xxviii.

109 See also the neighbouring poem, 'Fear', CP95. De la Mare said
that there are intelligent animals above us and quoted Plotinus:
'Air and the sky are not lifeless, there also dwell all good
souls', Introduction, *The Ghost Book; or, They Walk Again*, an
anthology of Ghost Stories, chosen by Colin de la Mare (1931),
page 14 (footnote).

110 TLS, 27 November 1919, PV, p.100 (W.196).

111 'The gradual awakening of a sixth sense may renew and trans-
mogrify the whole habitable globe', 'Maps in Fact and Fiction',
TLS, 30 July 1914, pp.361—62 (p.361) (W.88).

112 See CP540—543.

113 See also 'Voices' and the extra stanza in the footnote:

So are we haunted; night and day
Invisible witnesses
Speak, or keep silent; watch and wait. . . (CP71—72)

Cp. 'Who walks with us on the hills?' (CP254); and
T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, V. 'What the Thunder said': 'Who is
the third who walks always beside you?' (line 359), and 'What
is that sound high in the air?' (line 366).

114 *BTD*, p.26. Compare: 'Music', CP199; 'The Creek', CP484; 'The
Old Angler', CP226—28, which each feature a Naiad.

115 *Henry Brocken*, p.161 (Chapter 11).

116 *Apostate*; the quotations are from pp. 207, 209, 207, 208.

117 *PV*, p.99.

- 118 (i) 'The Tryst', CP193—94, iii
(ii) 'Outer Darkness', CP492—94, viii
(iii) 'Titmouse', CP229, iii
(iv) 'The Song of Finis', CP188, ii.

119 See also Housman's 'For my Funeral', which expresses the belief
that life has no conscious hereafter.

120 In 'Thomas Hardy's Lyrics' de la Mare wrote: 'Wherefore relen-
ting and tenderness often steal into the limning of this Di-
vine conception, and pity smiles from the eye-holes of the cold
mask of the ironic', *PV*, p.98. In 'The Life', Hardy strongly
repudiated the prevalent idea of his pessimism.

121 'The Laureate of Pessimism', *TLS*, 14 July 1910, p.248 (W.24).

122 *WCh*.CP569, x.

123 One may note in the phrase 'and my heart was dumb' a link with
Dylan Thomas, who used a similar phrase in 'The Force that
Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower'; this Force seems to
have something in common with de la Mare's idea of a mysterious
force or spirit pervading the universe, of which man is an in-
tegral part; see 'The Miracle', CP68:

Who beckons the green ivy up
Its solitary tower of stone?
What spirit lures the bindweed's cup
Unfaltering on;
Calls even the starry lichen to climb
By agelong inches endless Time?

Compare Vaughan, 'The Tempest': 'trees, herbs, flowres all strive
upwards stil, and point him the way home'.

- 124 Compare:
But what far-beckoning mysteries hide there,
In those phantasmal sockets, bleak and bare?
Visions frequent their dark; but not *Despair*. (WCh.CP577,viii)
- 125 *L'Œuvre*, p.46. Blake is amongst the five Greats who are frequently quoted by de la Mare, she says; the others are Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Beddoes.
- 126 Compare 'The Visionary', CP300, ii. See also 'Lost World', for the 'inward companion' from whom man the 'infamous wrecker' of the pure life, has been separated (CP534); 'Haunted', for the 'inward presence' that 'slumbers not' (CP130—31, iv); and 'Go Far; Come Near': 'You still must be / The centre of your own small mystery . . . You are your Universe' (CP544—45, i,iii).
- 127 'The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination; that is God Himself, the Divine Body', Blake's *Appendix to The Prophetic Books* (From Blake's Engraving of the Laocoon).
- 128 *Ibid.*, 'There is no Natural Religion' (Part the Second), I.
- 129 *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 13. Compare: 'The material world . . . is God's reflex of the spirit and imagination of man', de la Mare, 'Life Desiring Life', *TLS*, 2 October 1919, p.527(W.191).
- 130 See Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XIII, 89, 167—68.
- 131 *EOM*, p.39; See also: '. . . imagination that not merely invents, but that creates, and pierces to the inmost spirit and being of life, humanity and nature', *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, p.12, PS, p.179.
- 132 Bodleian Library, MS Engl.Lett. c.376, p.31 (19.II.08).
- 133 Book I, 428; see also, Book V, 516: 'A gracious Spirit o'er this earth presides'.
- 134 Respectively: *The Prelude*, XIII, 71, 72; 'Lines: Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 96—103.
- 135 'The Poems of Ralph Hodgson', *TLS*, 7 October 1915, p.342 (W.135).
- 136 *The Prelude*, Book XIII, 1—119.
- 137 See 'Tintern Abbey': '. . . Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her;' (lines 123—24).
- 138 *The Prelude*, Book I, 591.
- 139 Compare 'The Rainbow', CP485; de la Mare quoted the first two lines of Wordsworth's 'Rainbow' in *Animal Stories*, xviii.
- 140 'Tintern Abbey', lines 51—57.

- 141 Introduction, M. M. Johnson, *The Hedgerows: Poems* (1949), xi; compare 'Tintern Abbey', lines 26—31.
- 142 *The Prelude*, VI, 567—572.
- 143 'The Personality of Walter de la Mare', *Listener*, 30 April 1953, p.712.
- 144 *Animal Stories*, p.xx.
- 145 See 'Outer Darkness', CP492—94, v.
- 146 See respectively: 'Traveller, Forbear', CP756; 'The Visionary', CP300, iii; 'I Sit Alone', CP286, iii.

(f) Man's Life in a Cosmic Perspective

- 147 It is interesting to note de la Mare's friendships and long conversations with Dr Martin Johnson, for whose *Art and Scientific Thought* he wrote the foreword, and with Dr Russell Brain, who showed de la Mare's many artistic and scientific interests in his *Tea with Walter de la Mare*. According to his son Richard, he was interested in time, archaeology and astronomy, having read, for example, Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927), Bellamy's *Built Before the Flood: the Problem of the Tiahuanco Ruins* (1943), and Sir James Jeans's *The Mysterious Universe* and *The Stars in their Courses* (1930, 1931).
- 148 De la Mare wrote in similar vein in the prefatory notes to *The Burning-Glass* and *Inward Companion*; see 'Bibliographical Appendix', CP898—99.
- 149 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.16. It would be interesting, in this connection, to make a study of de la Mare's many revisions; see the remarks on revisions and differing versions in the Bibliographical Appendix, CP889—99 and in the Editorial Introduction, CP, p.xiii.
- 150 See chronological bibliography in *L'Œuvre*, pp.475—93, with special reference to the years 1923 to 1951, pp.478—90. The collections of short stories were published mainly in these years (though written earlier in many cases), and the anthologies in 1923, 1931, 1939 and 1943.
- 151 See Appendix II. De la Mare discussed the problem of time in a letter (17 March 1950) to Dr F. C. Nicholson: 'Would you agree that the future is a nebulosity inhabited by phantoms of actuality in a brightish light, that the past is dark, much narrower, and that its memories however vivid and full of colour and so forth are far more confined than any thoughts of the future. When I think of any incident in my childhood it is as if it were contained in a small space, glassed and surrounded more or less with the unknown. Recovered memories come in

upon you out of the dark as it were. The present, of course, has no being at all, as Time. But this is only stumbling along. It is certainly true that the greater the pressure of events, the less one is conscious of their duration. In any case you only guess duration . . . One queer problem . . . is to tackle the two concurrent times of which we are aware, that of external events . . . and that of the mind . . . Indeed is that Time at all?'
MS Letters of Walter de la Mare to Dr F. D. Nicholson and Mrs Mary Nicholson, 1941—1956, University of Edinburgh Library, MS, GEN 715/1, nos. 39—91, No.74.

- 152 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.25.
- 153 *The Traveller*, CP516,ix; CP515,ii,iv; CP516,i. In a letter (18 September 1944), de la Mare mentioned that he had just finished 'an absurdly fantastic piece of verse concerning a traveller who descends upon the eye of the world', MS letter to Dr F. D. Nicholson, University of Edinburgh Library, MS, GEN 715/1, No.54.
- 154 *Poetry Review*, 42 (1951—1952), pp.339—40 (p.339).
- 155 See respectively: 'Georgian Poetry', *PV*, p.127; 'Maps in Fact and Fiction', *PV*, p.59.
- 156 *Tea*, p.32.
- 157 *The Stars in their Courses* (1931), p.152 (Chapter 8). Compare de la Mare's 'Futility', CP254, iii.
- 158 See 'The Flower': 'And man — a transient object in this vast . . . wheels his wondrous features to the sky' (CP231); *WCh.*: 'Strange prodigy is Man. Of so short stay,/ Yet linked with Vega and with Nineveh' (CP576,i). Compare 'Humanity', CP81 .
- 159 See respectively: 'The Candle', CP610,iii; *WCh.* CP569,v; 'Usury', CP523—24, iii.
- 160 'Mont Blanc', IV, 96; III, 49—54. See also 'Adonais', xliii: 'He is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely . . . The one Spirit's plastic stress / Sweeps through the dull dense world . . .'; and 'Sonnet' (1824):

Lift not the painted veil which those who live
 Call Life . . . behind, lurk Fear
 And Hope, twin Destinies; who ever weave
 Their shadows, o'er the chasm, sightless and drear.
- 161 'No!', CP859, ii, iii.
- 162 *L'Œuvre*, p.414.
- 163 'The Solitary Bird', CP459, i. Compare: 'I roved the Past — a thousand thousand years,/ And . . . Listened, as yesterday, to the song of birds', 'The Unrent Pattern', CP500.

- 164 'The Exile', CP201, and compare 'All the Way', CP431.
165 *WCh.*, CP587, ix.
166 CP371—72, ii, vi, ix, x.

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CHAPTER 6

IMAGERY I: GENERAL DISCUSSION

- * James Reeves, *Understanding Poetry* (1965), Pan Books Ltd (1967) Chapter 18, p.179.

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1 For discussion of the importance in Romantic literature of the archetypal theme of the Journey, see Bernard Blackstone, *The Lost Travellers: A Romantic Theme with Variations* (1962), and R. A. Foakes, *The Romantic Assertion: A Study in the Language of Nineteenth Century Poetry* (1958).
- 2 *The Use of Imagination: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind* (1959), Chapter 5, p.86.
- 3 'How a mere arrangement of words enables us to see beyond its ostensible motives and intentions into the secret mind responsible for it is one of the enigmas of man's soul. It can as subtly bewray the heart', *Poetry in Prose*, in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 21 (1935), p.55. See A Note on the References, p.3: there is often a considerable difference between the original wording of *Poetry in Prose* and the revised version in *PS* (pp.80—171).
- 4 *Behold This Dreamer*, p.78.
- 5 See de la Mare's Introduction to his *Stories, Essays and Poems in Everyman's Library* No. 940, edited by Ernest Rhys (1938), pp.ix—xvi (p. xv). It is possible that de la Mare borrowed the phrase 'the secret sharer' from Joseph Conrad's story *The Secret Sharer* (1912).
- 6 *The Language of Modern Poetry* (1976), p.328.
- 7 *Poetry in Prose*, *PS*, pp.157, 155.
- 8 Some modern critics feel that an image is any unit of a literary structure which can be isolated for critical attention.
- 9 *The Romantic Assertion*, p.30.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 31—36.
- 11 *So Long to Learn: Chapters of an Autobiography* (1952), p. 215.

(2) THE ROMANTIC NATURE OF DE LA MARE'S IMAGERY

- 12 Bodleian A,10, TS 'On Childhood', p.12 (see Chapter 3, Note 103). Compare Chapter 3 (2) on Imagination.

- 13 'On Childhood', p. 9.
- 14 University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Letters of Edward Thomas to Walter de la Mare, M.S.Engl.Lett. c.376, No.155,28.v.12.
- 15 'Popular Poetry', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol.220, No.450 (1914), 412—26 (p.425).
- 16 See 'The Spirit of Romance', de la Mare's review of *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, by Arthur Symons, in *The Bookman*, vol.37, 219 (1909), 152—53 (p.152).
- 17 *Edinburgh Review*, vol.220, 450 (1914), p.424.
- 18 See, for example, Baudelaire's poems 'L'Horloge' and 'La Voix'. For further comment on Baudelaire and his poetry see: Martin Turnbull, *Baudelaire: A Study of his Poetry* (1953), and *Baudelaire*, introduced and edited by Francis Scarfe, The Penguin Poets (1961). Note that de la Mare quoted Alan Conder's translation of 'L'Horloge' in *Love*, No.369; and also 'Beauty', No.169 and 'The Ransom', No.185.
- 19 *Desert Islands*, pp. 92, 60.
- 20 'But all true experience is the outcome of observation and of feeling in unity. It isn't realism we desire but realization', 'On Childhood', p.10.
- 21 Geoffrey N. Leech in *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969) states his belief that a creative writer enjoys freedom to range over all resources of language and can borrow from all ages and sources — conversational, archaic, etc.
- 22 'Poetry in Walter de la Mare', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), p.69.
- 23 'The Poetry of Experience', *TLS*, 1 December 1950, p.766; 'Triumph over Time', *TLS*, 24 August 1951, p. 527.
- 24 'Here's Wishing', broadcast 26 December 1938; reprinted in *Listener*, 5 January 1939, 18—19 (p.19). It is interesting to note that a modern critic writes of 'the present catastrophe in the Arts' and calls, like de la Mare, for a return from materialism and 'egoistical nihilism' to the belief in the primary value of the imaginative consciousness and the need to find and express one's essential potential: see David Holbrook, *Lost Bearings in English Poetry* (1977), pp. 228, 216, 232, 230.
- 25 *The Romantic Assertion*, p.36.

(3) THE SYMBOLIST POET: HIS USE OF 'NATURAL' AND 'LITERARY' IMAGES

- 26 Amongst the critics who think de la Mare a Symbolist are:
David Cecil, *Tribute*, p.66; Priestley, *Figures in Modern Literature* (1924), The Week-End Library (1928), 35—62 (pp.42—43); David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry*, p.183; Luce Bonnerot, *L'Œuvre*, p.408.
- 27 *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870—1930* (1931), p.21.
- 28 See his Introduction to his *Stories, Essays and Poems*, Everyman 940, p.xv. Compare Edmund Waller, 'Old Age', stanza ii:

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
 Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made.
- 29 See Coleridge, *Destiny of Nations*, lines 18—20:

For all that meets the bodily sense I deem
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet
 For infant minds

 and Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), i:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.
- 30 *A History of Modern Poetry*, p.186.
- 31 *Eight for Immortality* (1941), p.16.
- 32 See respectively: 'The Spirit of Man', *TLS*, 3 February 1916, p.50 (W.146); 'Digby Mackworth Dolben', *TLS*, 21 December 1911, p.530 (W.43); and *Love*, p. xlvi.
- 33 See *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*. The quotations are from the original edition (1919), pp. 5, 11, 16, 17, 16.
- 34 Foreword, pp. vii, viii.
- 35 *Art and Scientific Thought*, p.71, where he discussed de la Mare's poem 'The Monologue' and also 'The Cage'.
- 36 De la Mare did not like his name Walter, and preferred to be called Jack; see letter to Miss J. G. Sime (28 September 1942), Edinburgh University Library MS, GEN 715/1, No. 5/1.
- 37 Frank Kendon, *The Small Years* (1930), p. xi.
- 38 See 'Current Literature', *Edinburgh Review*, 218 (1913), p.190.

- 39 Compare 'The Monologue', CP239—40 and 'The Familiar', CP250; See also Anon., 'A Poet of Two Worlds: The Imagery of Mr. de la Mare', *TLS*, 1 August 1936, p.621.
- 40 'Metaphor', *TLS*, 2 March 1916, p.102 (W.149), *PV*, pp.169, 170.
- 41 'Walter de la Mare', Presidential Address to the English Association, p.11.
- 42 'Walter de la Mare', in *Scrutinies by Various Writers*, p.49.
- 43 *History of Modern Poetry*, pp.183—85.
- 44 *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*, p.82.
- 45 *TLS*, 2 March 1916, p.102 (W.149), *PV*, pp.169, 171.
- 46 See *Love*, footnote on p. cxlii.
- 47 'To the Heavenly Power', *TLS*, 27 March 1919, p.162 (W.179). See also 'The Moon' in *BTD*, pp.21—26, and compare 'Second Childhood', CP620, iii, iv; 'The Catechism', CP253, i; 'The Flower', CP742, i. The moon is a constant and ever-recurring symbol in de la Mare's work; perhaps it stands for the mystery behind the material appearances of this life.
- 48 *PV*, p.125.
- 49 Northrop Frye defines an archetype as a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole.
- 50 'An Irish Anthology', *TLS*, 16 December 1909, p.490 (W.19).
- 51 See *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934), where Maud Bodkin referred to Gilbert Murray's phrase about that within us which 'leaps in response to the effective presentation in poetry of an ancient theme', pp. 4, 2, 29. Gilbert Murray thought that the power of stirring this 'cry of the blood' is one of the last secrets of genius; see 'Hamlet and Orestes' in *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* (1927).
- 52 Frederick L. Gwynn and Ralph W. Condee, 'De la Mare's "The Listeners"', *Explicator*, 12 (1954), 26.
- 53 See respectively: 'A Poet of Two Worlds', *TLS*, 1 August 1936, p.621; A. E. Dyson, 'Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners"', *Critical Quarterly*, 2 (1960), pp.150—54.
- 54 Atkins, *Walter de la Mare: an Exploration*, p.39; *L'Œuvre*, p.298.
- 55 'Walter de la Mare's "Maerchen"', *Explicator*, 4 (1946), 29.

- 56 See Appendix II.
- 57 Edinburgh University Library MS, GEN 715/1, No.8/1.
Compare: 'A poem may have as many different meanings as there
are different minds', *Come Hither*, p. xxxiii.
- 58 *TLS*, 1 August 1936, p.621.
- 59 See *The Language Poets Use* (1962), pp.176—78, where she quotes
R. A. Foakes (Chapter 8).
- 60 *The Lost Travellers* (1962), p.36.
- 61 See for example: 'Never-To-Be' and 'The Dark Château', CP123—24
(palace and château); 'Time Passes', CP127 (Tower of Ivory);
'Maerchen' and 'Gold', CP251 (palace and turret); 'The Tower',
CP544; 'The Palace of Time' in *WCh.*, CP559—60.
- 62 See article by de la Mare on G. M. Trevelyan's pamphlet *Must
England's Beauty Perish*, in *Evening News*, 20 February 1929. This
news cutting was found in Bodleian A,10.
- 63 See Edmund Blunden and Leonard Clark, *Tribute to Walter de la Mare*
(1974), pp. 1, 10.
- 64 *BTD*, p.26.
- 65 'On Childhood', Bodleian A,10, pp.10—11.
- 66 Compare Blackstone's 'complex' symbols, *The Lost Travellers*, pp.36—38.
- 67 'An Irish Poet', *TLS*, 30 October 1919, p.607 (W.192). This quo-
tation throws an interesting light on a phrase in de la Mare's
'Araby', CP739, iii: "'Twas Man who mapped this Araby'. He implies
here that Arabia is a land of the imagination, not a land of geo-
graphical exactitude, thus refuting Robert Graves's uncomprehending
criticism of the lack of realism in de la Mare's fantastic poem
'Arabia', CP121, in *The Common Asphodel* (1949). See Chapter 1, p.24.
- 68 *TLS*, 30 October 1919, p.607 (W.192).
- 69 *The Business of Criticism* (1959), p.99.

(4) THE HOLISTIC PATTERN OF HIS IMAGERY: HIS HANDLING OF THE
IMAGE OF THE HOUSE

(a) The Symbolic Ramifications of the 'House'

- 70 'De la Mare's "The Listeners"', *Explicator*, 3 (1945), 42.
- 71 'De la Mare's "Maerchen"', *Explicator*, 4 (1946), 29.

- 72 See *Beginning*, p.61. De la Mare's strong interest in the haunted house is shown in his Introduction to *The Ghost Book*; or, *They Walk Again* where he described a typical de la Mare house which he and his son Colin had once come upon: a half-opened iron gate led to a vacant house in a remote neglected garden with a solitary fir tree on the lawn, from which all birds had flown. They later heard it was haunted (p.29).
- 73 See 'Ethan Frome', *TLS*, 19 October 1911, p.399 (W.41); *Desert Islands*, p.240.
- 74 See again *The Ghost Book*, p.26: 'But when ghosts are about, objects become symbols. They too, like revenants themselves, waver in being, between two worlds'. Note the simple diction in this early, ballad-type poem. It contains many of de la Mare's favourite 'natural' images drawn from the ordinary world, but invested with acquired, personal symbolism, e.g. door, taper, house, corridor, walls, glass, blue eyes, stairs, wind, window, moon, cellar, attic and home.
- 75 'Ethan Frome', *TLS*, 19 October 1911, p.399 (W.41).
- 76 See respectively: *Beginning*, p.36; *Connoisseur*, pp.322, 327; *Connoisseur*, p.26; *On the Edge*, p.5. See also: 'The Creatures', 'The Looking Glass', 'The Almond Tree', 'The Bird of Travel', all in *The Riddle*; 'The Anniversary', 'The Face', 'The Quincunx', in *Beginning*; 'The Willows' in *On the Edge*; 'Lucy' in *Broomsticks*.
- 77 See respectively: 'The Listeners', CP126; 'The Empty House', CP195; 'The Children of Stare', CP63; 'Haunted', CP36; 'The Old Summer-house', CP388; 'The House', CP522; 'Empty', CP486; 'I Dream of a Place', CP447; 'The House', CP426.
- 78 'Ruskin's Letters', *TLS*, 19 March 1909, 101—02 (p.102), PV, p.215 (W.8). Note the gloss on 'The Phantom', CP33, vi.

(b) The House as Symbol for Life and the World

- 79 'Everyman's Library', *TLS*, 3 March 1910, p.72 (W.22);
'"See, Here's the Warrant..."', CP533, ii.

(c) Symbol for the Body

- 80 See Vaughan, 'Burial', i; Traherne, 'The Praeparative', i.

(d) Symbol for the Mind, Imagination, Sleep and Dream

- 81 'After the Wessex Edition', PV, p.30.
- 82 See CP123; CP123—24; CP127.

- 83 *BTD*, pp.80—81. This is an example of the typical bookish 'literary' image, and may remind us of de la Mare's very catholic literary background; for note the 'blatant beast' in *The Revelation*, 14. 11; 13. 4; and 3. 20; and also in *The Faerie Queene*, VI.3. 24.
- 84 See 'The Listeners', *CP*126; 'Outer Darkness', *CP*492—94, viii. For the child and the 'beauteous one', see 'The Phantom', *CP*70; see also *Love*, p.lvi.

(e) Symbol for Death

- 85 'Where is thy Victory?', *CP*73—74, v. Compare also the image of the wicket gate to death in 'The Quiet Enemy', *CP*249—50, iii, and 'The Bottle', *CP*288—89, vii.
- 86 See respectively: *The Revelation*, 3. 20; *Paradise Lost*, VII, 565; 'To the Queen', *Addendum to the Later Poems in the Rossetti MS* (quoted from Blake by de la Mare in notes to *Come Hither*, p.666).
- 87 *Stories from the Bible*, p. x. Compare: 'I was taught to revere the Bible . . . which I at least *heard* read . . . five times over', *EOM*, p.335. See Chapter 5 (c), p.156.
- 88 Compare: 'Laid Low', *CP*478, iii: 'Who enters, enters once — comes not again'; 'The House', *CP*522, v: ' . . . since I soon must be going / To another old house instead'.
- 89 See also stanza ix:

They shut the dark out from the painted wall,
With candles dared the shadow at the door,
Sang down the faint reiterated call
Of those who came no more.

Note the echoes of Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's', x, and Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubáiyát of Ōmār Khayyám* (ed.1), xxi.

(f) Symbol for Home

- 90 See for example, 'Comfort', *CP*283 (discussed in Chapter 9, 2(c)).
- 91 *L'Œuvre*, p.409.
- 92 'And So Good Night', *TLS*, 25 November 1915, p.426 (*W*.139).
- 93 *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (1910), Faber paper covered edition 1969, *The Three Royal Monkeys*, p.23 (Chapter 2).
- 94 See his Introduction to *Walter de la Mare: A Checklist*, prepared on the occasion of an exhibition of his books and MSS at the National Book League 7 Albemarle Street London W1, 20th April to 19th May 1956, published for the National Book League at The University Press Cambridge (1956), pp. vii—ix (p.viii).

(g) Symbol for Paradise and the Goal

- 95 'The Exile', CP201, i. Compare 'The Pilgrim', CP24—26, xv: 'Oh, out of terror and dark to come / In sight of home!' See also: 'Come', CP60; 'Music Unheard', CP116; 'Where', CP412.
- 96 See *The Lost Travellers*, p.5, where Blackstone says that travel is the master theme of the major Romantic poets, and on p.18: 'Adam, the primeval exile, is our great archetype'.
- 97 'The Poetry of Henry Vaughan', *TLS*, 15 July 1915, 233—34 (p.234) (*W*.123), *PV*, p.153. Richard Church in *Eight for Immortality* wrote that de la Mare had an affinity with Vaughan (p.15); and Forrest Reid in *Walter de la Mare* remarked that de la Mare's Home 'is the Heaven of Vaughan and Traherne' (p.166).
- 98 See Notes 58 and 69.
- 99 See personal letter (1 May 1979) from Mr John Lehmann: 'The image of him as a purveyor of rather ghostly and whimsy poems has certainly got pretty well fixed; but as you say, and as I entirely agree, he is a poet of a far wider range.'

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CHAPTER 7

IMAGERY II: THE TRAVELLER'S JOURNEY

- * Walter de la Mare, 'The Lovely Myfanwy', *Broomsticks*, p.263.

(1) INTRODUCTION: THE TRAVELLER

- 1 See V. Sackville-West, 'A Note on *The Traveller*', in *Tribute*, 19—24 (p.21). She describes the poem as an allegory 'though so lightly underlined, so innocent of the cruder moralising, that its suggestiveness much exceeds its intended philosophy, as should be true of all the subtler forms of allegory' (pp.20—21).
- 2 See Appendix II. De la Mare had read H. S. Bellamy, *Built Before the Flood: The Problem of the Tiahuanaco Ruins* (1943). For further information about Lake Titicaca, the famous monolithic doorway at Tiahuanacu, and the vast city built in the megalithic age on this barren plateau 13-14,000 feet above sea level, see Sir Clements R. Markham, *The Incas of Peru* (1910), Chapter 2. De la Mare mentioned Titicaca in his *Desert Islands*, p.240: 'As solitary in the eye of fancy as the island of the Incas in the high lake of Titicaca'; and in *The Traveller*, CP501, iii: 'In saline marshes Titicaca lies — / Its ruins fabulous ere the Incas reigned'. Its 'lunar landscape' with 'those craters grisly cold' and 'Volcanic seas' are described in *The Traveller*, CP502, ix.
- 3 *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p.114.
- 4 *The Times*, 23 June 1956, p.10.
- 5 'Things Not Seen', *TLS*, 7 August 1913, p.328 (W.61).
- 6 *Early One Morning*, pp. 3—4. Compare 'To K. M.', CP346—47:
 And the dreamer's feet
 Scatter the leagues of paths secret to where at last meet
 Roads called Wickedness, Righteousness, broad-flung or strait,
 And the third that leads on to the Queen of fair Elfland's gate....
- 7 Compare, for example: Matthew 7. 12—13; *The Odyssey*; 'The Queen of Elfland' (No.136 in *Come Hither*), stanzas xii—xiv, 'yon narrow road' and 'that braid braid road'; and de la Mare's own stories 'The Lovely Myfanwy' and 'Sambo and the Snow Mountains' (*Collected Stories for Children*, 1947).

(2) CHRONOLOGICAL PROGRESSION OF THE JOURNEY IMAGE

- 8 I am ignoring the short stories here which, though published in periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were not brought together in book form until the 1920s and 1930s.

- 9 See *The Traveller*: CP508,viii; CP513,ii; CP509,v; CP510,ix; CP515,vi; CP514,ix; CP516,ix. Compare the image of the Inn of Death with Dryden's *Palamon and Arcite*, Book II, line 883: 'The world's an inn and death the journey's end'; and Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, pt.ii, para.12: 'For the world, I count it not an inn, but an hospital, and a place, not to live, but to die in.' Note de la Mare's 'Hospital', CP237:
- Welcome! Enter! This is the Inn at the Cross Roads,
Sign of the *Rising Sun*, of the *World's End*.
- 10 See respectively: 'The Traveller to the Reader', p.10; Chapter I, p.11, p.16.
- 11 The table of Contents in *Henry Brocken* gives relevant quotations for each of the literary subjects which de la Mare chose for his chapters, and each chapter has a quotation as heading.
- 12 See Note 9.
- 13 See *Henry Brocken*, Chapter 2, for example.
- 14 Compare this cavern with the archetypal 'caverns measureless to man' in 'Kubla Khan'. See Bernard Blackstone, *The Lost Travellers*, Chapter 3, where he writes that the cave is the Romantic symbol *par excellence* (p.36); and that it is the final refuge (p.39). See *The Three Royal Monkeys*, Chapters 23 and 20.
- 15 Chapter 24, 'Tishnar'.
- 16 V. Sackville-West, *Tribute*, p.21.
- 17 'Walter de la Mare', in *Scrutinies*, pp. 45—46.
- 18 See respectively: CP509, v; CP542, iv; CP541, ii.
- 19 CP128—30; CP126.
- 20 CP704—08; CP559—60.
- 21 See 'De la Mare's "The Listeners"', *Explicator*, 4 (1946), 31. See Chapter 6, Notes 52, 70.
- 22 Compare also: 'The Remonstrance', CP200, iii, iv; 'The Tower', CP544, iii.
- 23 (i) 'The Empty House', CP195, ii;
(ii) 'The Ghost', CP196—97, v
(iii) 'Outer Darkness' CP492—94, vii.

- 24 'The Dead Knight' was quoted by de la Mare in *Come Hither* (No.63). Compare Edwin Muir's 'The Enchanted Knight', ii:

Long since the rust its gardens here has planned,
Flowering his armour like an autumn field.
From his sharp breast-plate to his iron hand
A spider's web is stretched, a phantom shield.

- 25 Knowing de la Mare's love of the old ballads, he may well have been influenced here by the Scottish ballad 'The Twa Corbies':
'O'er his white banes, when they are bare, / The wind sall blaw for evermair'.

- 26 'Defeat', CP369, ii; *The Traveller*, CP508, viii, CP514,vi.

- 27 *The Traveller*, CP501,iv, ii; 'Defeat', CP369, iv.

- 28 *The Traveller*, CP514,ix; 'Defeat', CP369,iv.

- 29 'Defeat', CP369,vi, viii; *The Traveller*, CP516, i.

(3) USE OF THE 'LITERARY' IMAGE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE SONG OF FINIS'

- 30 See respectively: 'The Pilgrim', CP24—26; 'The Journey', CP128—30; 'The Visionary', CP300; 'Come', CP60; 'The Exile', CP201; 'The Horseman',CP144—45; 'The Song of Finis', CP188.

- 31 CH, No.310. 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' also appears in CH, No.137.

- 32 Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry 1880—1940* (1951), p.124.

- 33 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.25.

- 34 *Walter de la Mare*, pp. 174, 165.

- 35 See respectively: CP188,ii; CP126; CP254; CP492—94.

- 36 Luce Bonnerot writes at length on the importance of dream in the work of de la Mare, in *L'Œuvre*, pp.237—57. See also de la Mare's long poem 'Dreams', CP347—53, xxix, xxx.

- 37 The Revelation,6.8: 'And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him'. Compare de la Mare's 'The Dwelling-Place', CP124—26, v: 'Heeding not one who on white horse upborne / With soundless hoofs did ride'.

- 38 See Barfield, 'Poetry in Walter de la Mare', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), p.75.

- 39 'Outer Darkness', CP494, v.

- 40 'Mr Cunninghame Graham's Short Stories', *TLS*, 9 May 1912,p.191 (W.46).

- 41 See *The Traveller*: CP514,i,iv; CP510, 1—iii; CP502,vii, viii; CP505, v; CP507, ix; CP509, ix.
- 42 CP802—03. See his reviews: 'Life Desiring Life', *TLS*, 2 October 1916, p.527 (W.191): 'Far too many eager poets have been run away with by their Pegasus and seen no more'; 'Pall Mall and Paraguay', *TLS*, 26 October 1916, p.511 (W.168); 'Doggerel', *TLS*, 21 August 1913, 341—42 (p.341)(W.62); and 'I Became an Author', *Listener*, 8 September 1938, 473—74, 505 (p.505).
- 43 See respectively: CP703—04; CP124—26,v; CP346—47,iii.
- 44 See 'Home', CP133—34, i. Compare Edwin Muir, 'Variations on a Time Theme', i—xiv; *The Waste Land*, V, 331—58. There are other interesting analogies between some of de la Mare's images and those of Eliot. For example, compare *The Waste Land*, I, 60—68, and de la Mare's 'Up and Down', CP137, in *Peacock Pie* (1913) and V, 359—62 with de la Mare's 'Who', CP254, in *The Veil* (1921). See also Chapter 8 (7) on Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*, which de la Mare quoted from in *Love*, No. 694.
- 45 CP188, i; CP368—69; CP512, ix.
- 46 See *The Traveller*, CP511, ix; CP512, ii.
- 47 Wallace Stevens said of the concept of escapism: 'The poetic process is psychologically an escapist process. The chatter about escapism is, to my way of thinking, merely common cant', *The Necessary Angel* (1960), quoted in *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, edited by James Scully (1966), p.148.
- 48 'Poetry in Walter de la Mare', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), pp. 75—76.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp.76—81. See CP90; CP31—32.
- 50 See de la Mare: 'God Keep me Still', *TLS*, 16 January 1919, p.31 (W.178); 'On the Threshold', *TLS*, 13 November 1919, p.647 (W.194); 'A Quiet Life', in *Essays by Divers Hands, Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, New Series, 20, edited by Gordon Bottomley (1943), 63—83 (p.82).
- 51 See Chapter 9, 3(c) for further discussion of 'The Song of Finis'.
- (4) USE OF THE 'NATURAL' IMAGE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE RAILWAY JUNCTION'
- 52 See Greene, *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*, p.79; John Atkins, *Walter de la Mare: An Exploration*, p.28.
- 53 See *Love*, p. xxxvii.

- 54 Many de la Mare stories are set in trains or stations. See, for example: 'Lichen' in *Ding Dong Bell* (pp.1—31); 'A Nest of Singing Birds' and 'A Froward Child' in *Wind Blows Over* (pp. 235—75 and pp.103—38); 'Crewe' in *On the Edge* (pp.85—116); 'The Creatures' and 'The Tree' in *Riddle* (pp. 273—88 and pp.205—31).
- 55 'The Supernatural in Nature', *TLS*, 6 November 1919, p.617 (W.193).
- 56 *Broomsticks*, p.377.
- 57 'Clayhanger', *TLS*, 15 September 1910, p.238 (W.27).
- 58 Hardy's poem is quoted by de la Mare in *Come Hither*, No.31 and commented upon in his review of Hardy's *Collected Poems* in *TLS*, 27 November 1919, pp.681—2 (W.196), *PV*, pp.95—103. Thomas's poem is quoted in *Come Hither*, No.104.
- 59 Compare Larkin, 'The Whitsun Weddings' (1964): '...this frail / Travelling coincidence' with de la Mare's 'I nothing know why thus we met' (vi). See, for example, Betjeman's 'Perschore Station, or A Liverish Journey First Class'; 'Dilton Marsh Halt'; 'Great Central Railway Sheffield Victoria to Banbury'.
- 60 See *Understanding Poetry*, Chapter 2. Reeves calls de la Mare the leading poet of the Georgian period and central to the movement at its best. He included 17 de la Mare poems in his *Georgian Poetry* (1962), more than for any poet except W. H. Davies (22).
- 61 See respectively: *Riddle*, p.155; *Ding Dong Bell*, p.7.
- 62 'The Dreams of Men', *TLS*, 18 October 1917, p.502 (W.173), *PV*, p.120.
- 63 'Good Company', *CP*293—95, xix, v. Compare the Bunyanesque Inn of the World's End in *Henry Brocken*, with its 'garrulous company', Chapter 11, p.162.
- 64 See p.229, Note 23.
- 65 See respectively: *On the Edge*, p.43; *Riddle*, pp. 273, 275. See also Note 54 above.
- 66 *Memoirs of a Midget*, Chapter Seven, pp.41—42.
- 67 *Ding Dong Bell*, pp.30—31.
- 68 *Memoirs of a Midget*, Introduction, p. ix.
- 69 *Beginning*, pp. 96—124; *Broomsticks*, pp. 137—172.
- 70 *Riddle*, pp.295—303; pp. 273—88; *Connoisseur*, pp.309—58.
- 71 *Riddle*, pp.55—68; pp.289—94.

- 72 Introduction to *The Hedgerows: Poems* by M. M. Johnson, p.xi, and 'Metaphor', *TLS*, 2 March 1916, p.102 (*W*.149), *PV*, p.170.
- 73 'Fiona Macleod', *TLS*, 17 November 1910, pp.445—46 (*W*.30), *PV*, p.207.
- 74 'Fiona and the Fairies', *TLS*, 11 December 1919, p.740 (*W*.197).
- 75 *Riddle*, p.290.
- 76 We smile at 'the glitter and the ornament —a wedding cake that has no cake inside', 'Mr. de la Mare's World: The Reality and the Dream. Chimes from an Unseen Tower', *TLS*, 6 June 1942, pp.282, 286 (p.282). Compare Garman's criticism of de la Mare's sensibility to the 'jingling value of words', *Scrutinies*, p.49.
- 77 For further discussion of 'The Railway Junction', see Chapter 9, 3(d).

(5) IMAGES OF TIME AND THE FINAL GOAL

- 78 Compare 'With All Thy Might', *TLS*, 29 October 1914, p.474 (*W*.100), where de la Mare writes about 'the circle of life'.
- 79 Significantly, this poem was entitled 'Karma' in *The Fleeting*. One of the meanings of this Sanskrit word in Hinduism and occult philosophy is the entity of the individual or of the universe carried along in the series of the Wheel of Life. Compare Edwin Muir's 'The Stationary Journey'.
- 80 *WCh.*, CP565,iii. Compare *WCh.*, CP588,viii: 'All is in flux, the coming and the gone'.
- 81 Compare Tom and the strange birds in 'Visitors', *Broomsticks*, p.372:
And it seemed once more to Tom as if the whole world and his own small life had floated off into a dream, and that he had stood watching their movements and their beauty for as many centuries as the huge oak that towered above the Farm had stood with out-flung boughs, bearing its flowers and its acorns from Spring on to Spring and from Autumn to Autumn until this very morning.

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CHAPTER 8

IMAGERY III: THE TRAVELLER'S GOAL

* Walter de la Mare, *Love*, p. cxl.

(1) THE MYTHIC PATTERN: EXILED MAN AND HIS JOURNEY TO EDEN

- 1 See 'Maps in Fact and Fiction', *TLS*, 30 July 1914, pp.361—62 (p.362) (*W*.88), and compare 'where you would be' in 'The Cage', *CP*198, iii.
- 2 'The Mask of Transiency', *TLS*, 12 June 1919, p.323 (*W*.183).
- 3 See Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, particularly Chapters 3, 4 and 5.
- 4 The most typical, recurring words in de la Mare's poetic vocabulary are: transient, tryst, fleeting, transitory, brood. Others which he uses very frequently are: ghost, tranquil, silence, steadfast, changeless, home, strange, traveller, haunting, exile, forlorn, solitary, border and edge. Luce Bonnerot comments on these favourite words in *L'Œuvre*, pp.352—54, in her chapter on 'La Langue'. She quotes the poem 'Homesick', *CP*378, as containing eleven of his most characteristic words.
- 5 See Note 65.
- 6 Compare 'The Exile', *CP*201; 'Exile', *CP*115.
- 7 See 'The Summons', *CP*456, i; *The Traveller*, *CP*502, x.
- 8 In 'Flowers and Poetry', de la Mare noted that the first chapter of Genesis 'altogether refrains from the mention of flowers — it refers only to grass, herb, seed and fruit —', *PS*, p.207. He explicitly stated that he loved Milton in *Love*, p.xxxvii; the epigraph to Chapter VI of *Early One Morning* is Milton's lines: 'And then in Eden's paradise, / He placéd him to dwell' (p.83).
- 9 See respectively: 'a river of water crystal clear' in 'A Dream', *CP*387, ii; 'the icy hills' in 'The Mountains', *CP*122; 'a dense wood, a drear wood' in 'Bitter Waters', *CP*802. Compare Dante's dark wood, Tolkien's forest and river and mountains, and the dark wood of fairy tales and fantasies, such as George MacDonald's *Lilith* and *Phantastes*, to consider only a few of such archetypal landscapes.
- 10 See Vaughan, 'Peace', lines 1—2, 15; 'The Retreat', line 26.
- 11 'The Spectacle', *CP*461—62, iii.

- 12 Introduction to Kendon's *The Small Years*, p. xvi.
- 13 'The Decoy', CP252, v. Compare again the 'sweet cheat' in 'The Ghost', CP196—97 and the 'cheating, sweet delight' in 'Eyes', CP203; see also 'She whom I vision many masks has worn' and the marginal quotation from Crashaw, 'Whoe'er she bee...' in *WCh.*, CP559, ii.
- 14 See 'Lost World', CP534, a poem much admired by Auden in his 'Walter de la Mare', *Observer*, 24 June 1956, p.10. It is relevant here to note that Jung's *anima* is a woman. In Teutonic mythology there was a belief in a second, half-material ego. The Scandinavians called it the *fylgja*, which means roughly 'the follower, the second'. See Chapter 4 (2a).
- 15 See respectively: 'Music Unheard', CP116,i; 'The Quiet Enemy', CP249—50,iii; 'The Bottle', CP288—89,vii. Compare: '... to win a little nearer to that ideal self which is the hope and justification of life on earth', de la Mare, 'Patriotic Poetry', *TLS*, 3 September 1914, p.405 (*W.91*).
- 16 But he also believed that England is our earthly paradise. See: 'She is her poets' beauty and peace, the highway of their pilgrimage, the woof of their dreams, the earthly foreshowing and foreshadowing of their paradise', 'Patriotic Poetry', *TLS*, 3 September 1914 (*W.91*). Compare Shakespeare's 'This other Eden, demi-Paradise', *King Richard II*, II. 1. 40.
- 17 See 'The Revenant', CP704—08, viii. Compare Carlyle's Teufelsdröck who said that love is 'a discerning of the Infinite in the Finite, of the Idea made Real', *Sartor Resartus*, Book II, Chapter 5, on 'Romance'.

(2) SOME SOURCES OF DE LA MARE'S IMAGERY PATTERN

- 18 For the apt phrase 'unfashionable outsider', see Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford, 1982), p.216.
- 19 Critics who support this view are: Auden, Theodore Maynard, Priestley, Geoffrey Bullough and Luce Bonnerot.
- 20 *Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*, edited by F. L. Mulhauser, 2 vols (Oxford, 1957), I, 184.
- 21 *Amours de Voyage* (1858), I, Epilogue, line 287.
- 22 'Life is beautiful, Eustace, entrancing, enchanting to look at', *Amours de Voyage*, III. viii. 176. See also III. vi. 123—24.
- 23 See Hardy's 'The Last Chrysanthemum', vi; de la Mare's 'The Remonstrance', CP200, iii.

- 24 *Amours de Voyage*, II, Prologue, lines 3—4.
- 25 *Ibid.*, III. vi. 143—44. Patrick Scott notes, in the Introduction to his edition of the poem, Clough's cancelled lines in two early manuscripts after III.116: 'It is the virtue of Man to discern and love the Ideal', *Victorian Texts I* (Queensland, 1974), p.13.
- 26 *Amours de Voyage*, V. ix. 181, 185. Compare also Clough's letter (1852—53), 23 February: 'Are you aware that life is very like a railway? One gets into deep cuttings and long dark tunnels, where one sees nothing', *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, edited by Blanche Clough (1888).
- 27 *Amours de Voyage*, II. vi. 151. Compare: 'Things are never what they seem', de la Mare, 'Things Not Seen', *TLS*, 7 August 1913, p.328 (W.61).
- 28 See 'Popular Poetry', *Edinburgh Review*, 450 (October 1914), 412—26 (p.414); *EOM*, p.540.
- 29 Note how often de la Mare brought together the names of Vaughan, Traherne, Blake and Wordsworth. In *EOM* he wrote that they are 'the chief English poets who have shared a divination of childhood to which the term "mystical" has been applied', and that they declared that 'early childhood is a state of bliss' (p.100). Compare also *EOM*, pp.86—88 and *BTD*, p.99.
- 30 See footnote to p.59 in Duffin's *Walter de la Mare*.
- 31 (i) 'In a Library', *CP*361, iii.
 (ii) 'Dreams', *CP*113, ii.
 (iii) *WCh*.*CP*576, viii.
 (iv) *The Traveller*, *CP*506, v.
 Compare also: 'Music', *CP*199; 'The Remonstrance', *CP*200; 'A Sunday', *CP*359; 'Incantation', *CP*368; 'Known of Old', *CP*449; 'The Spectacle', *CP*461; 'The Exile', *CP*201; 'To Some Most Happy Men', *CP*638. See also Brain's remark that 'he had read a book which suggested that the soul came to this life with previous experience of it', *Tea*, p.124.
- 32 *The Traveller*, *CP*514, ix. Compare: 'Even those of us whose glimpses of our "angel infancy" are far fewer and less vivid than his would agree that a light and intensity and a simple richness of being were ours then which is rare indeed in later life, and that we look back on those early days across a blue rift . . .' de la Mare, Introduction, *The Small Years*, p. x.
- 33 'The Retreat', lines 9—14. Compare: 'All things here shew him heaven', 'The Tempest', v.

- 34 De la Mare quoted this line from Wordsworth's Ode, with lines from 'The Retreate' in his review of Herbert Read's *The Innocent Eye*, *TLS*, 6 April 1933, p.245 (W.213). He again quoted from 'The Retreate' (lines 7—8) in the margin of *WCh*.CP576, before stanza viii, and in *Love*, p.159. He reviewed *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, edited by Leonard Cyril Martin, 2 volumes (Oxford, 1914) in *TLS*, 15 July 1915, pp.233—34, *PV*, pp.146—55 (W.123).
- 35 Compare: 'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden;' Genesis 2. 7. All the proper names in the Introduction to *Come Hither* are capable of anagrammatic translation: Taroone (Tarune) = Nature; Sure Vine = Universe; East Dene = Eden (East); Thrae = Earth; Nahum Tarune = Human Nature; Ten Laps = planets. I have, however, been unable to deduce what Linnet Sarah stands for.
- 36 Perhaps stanza vi of the Ode provides a clue that Sarah is Earth, remembering that in the Bible Sarah is Abraham's wife, the mother of nations; see Genesis 22. 17—18: 'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'. Compare *Love*, p. lxviii: 'Sex is the active but erratic maid of all work in the House of Life; she lives in the kitchen, may be a drunken and gluttonous drab, or a perfect treasure'. Compare also the earthy servant Sarah in de la Mare's story 'The Looking Glass', *Riddle*, pp.55—68. De la Mare believed that man has the earth and the beast in him.
- 37 Compare *BTD*, p.67: 'Man assumes himself to be her[Nature's] fairy godchild'.
- 38 *L'Œuvre*, p.314 and Note 61, p.457. See: 'The Cage', CP198; 'The Tomtit', CP470; 'Thou art my Long-lost Peace', CP491; 'Out of a Dream', CP495; 'The Vision', CP496; 'It is a Wraith', CP627.
- 39 *Riddle*, pp.301—03. Compare 'Which Way?', CP311,ii: 'What far-off living well / I pine for . . . '
- 40 *The Prelude*, Book 13, lines 444—45.
- 41 See respectively: *WCh*. CP562,i; *The Prelude*, Book 13, lines 149—52.
- 42 See de la Mare's poems 'Books': 'Abiding joy is theirs; rich solitude', CP775—77,viii; 'In books found marvellous company,/ Wonder, romance, and mystery', CP818—24,iii; and *The Prelude*: 'That golden store of books', Book 5, 503; 'What I owed to Books in early life', Book 5, 631.
- 43 *EOM*, p.83.
- 44 *The Prelude*, Book 11, lines 258—78; *WCh*. CP580,vii. See also CP590,ix: 'Isles in oblivion such scenes remain'.
- 45 Book 13, lines 172—84. Compare the 'buried stream' in Matthew Arnold's 'The Buried Life' and the 'sacred river' in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'.

46 'Ode Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendor and Beauty'(written 1817, published 1820), iv.

47 'Dreams', CP347—53, vi; xxix; xxx; vii.

(3) DE LA MARE'S ROMANTIC CONTEMPORARIES

48 'As for being a romantic, I agree that I am, at least if you admit that all the part of literature which is interested in the undeveloped and potential part of the human spirit is romantic', *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, edited by P. H. Butter (1974), p.57 (23 June 1926).

49 'The Labyrinth', lines 47—49; 60; 65—66.

50 'Orpheus' Dream', ii. Compare also 'Adam's Dream' and 'Variations on a Time Theme'.

51 'Variations on a Time Theme', xiv.

52 'The Transfiguration', lines 7; 17—18.

53 'In Country Sleep', I, vi, vii.

54 *Ibid.*, I, vi, 39.

55 See *Studies of Type-Images in Poetry, Religion and Philosophy* (1951), p.125.

56 PV, p.32.

57 See respectively: Hardy, 'An Inquiry'; Muir, 'The Labyrinth', lines 69—70; Wordsworth, *Ode*, v.

58 'The little bird hops in its cage and sings and preens and gradually accepts its destiny', de la Mare, 'On Childhood', Bodleian A,10, p.2.

59 This quotation is repeated in WCh. CP586, marginalia i. De la Mare often used the looking-glass image himself: 'We resemble looking-glasses in this world, reflecting all we see; but we are by no means always flattering glasses. We also reflect what we do *not* actually see', *Animal Stories*, p.xix. Compare 'The Looking Glass', where Alice feels that her Spirit is reflected in the Garden as if in a mirror, *Riddle*, pp.55—68.

(4) THE CAGED BIRD AND RELATED IMAGES: DISCUSSION OF 'THE CAGE' AND 'THE MONOLOGUE'.

60 *Come Hither*, pp.100—115, contains 26 poems about birds, and these are supplemented by eight pages of notes, where de la Mare quoted Chaucer's lines on a caged bird and Blake's 'A robin redbreast in a cage' from *Auguries of Innocence*, pp.539—546. There are 17 poems about birds in his *Collected Rhymes and Verses*.

- 61 *Tea*, p.121. See also pp. 123—24 where de la Mare talked about different kinds of birdsong.
- 62 *The Golden Bough* (Abridged), 'The External Soul in Folk-Tales', Chapter 66, pp. 669, 670—77.
- 63 'The Solitary Bird', CP459. Compare the tapping beak at the casement in 'The Bird', CP427; the tapping at the window-pane in 'The Tomtit', CP470; the wild singing of the 'bodiless bird' in 'The Summons', CP456.
- 64 *Broomsticks*, pp.371, 376. Compare the noble, white-plumaged bird in 'The Bird of Travel', *Riddle*, p.147. See also 'The Border Bird', CP433—34; 'The Storm', CP440; 'Incantation', CP368.
- 65 The following are the poems where this prison and cage image is used: 'The Cage', CP198; 'Nocturne', CP201; 'Eyes', CP203; 'The Old Men', CP206; 'Dust to Dust', CP212; 'The Imp Within', CP225—26; 'Monologue', CP239—40; 'Fog', CP241; 'The Familiar', CP250; 'A Young Girl', CP306; 'The Spectacle', CP461—62; 'To a Candle', CP467—68; 'The Undercurrent', CP491—92; 'Out of a Dream', CP495; 'Lost World', CP534; *WCh*. CP586, ix.
- 66 This synaesthetic linkage is discussed more fully in Chapter 9, 3(e), where 'The Cage' is quoted in full.
- 67 See 'Lost World', CP534.
- 68 Compare 'The Voice', CP233.
- 69 Blake, 'The Little Boy Lost'; de la Mare, 'In a Glass Darkly', *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (*W*.170).
- 70 See St. John 8. 12; St. Matthew 17. 2.
- 71 De la Mare wrote of the various aspects of night and darkness in 'Night', *BTD*, pp.17—20, and about light and shadow in *CH*: 'I discovered afterwards, also, that shadows are only the absence of light, though light is needed to make them visible' (pp.xxxi—xxxii).
- 72 Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*; Shelley, *Adonais*, liv.
- 73 *Paradise Lost*, V, lines 74—75.
- 74 Compare: 'As we read, that spirit within us seems for the moment to have returned to a state of being and to an abode of which the earth with all its loveliness is only a partial and illusive reflection', *Poetry in Prose*, *PS*, p.151.
- 75 'The Supernatural in Nature', *TLS*, 6 November 1919, p.618 (*W*.193).
- 76 *BTD*, p.26; *Memoirs of a Midget*, p.189.

- 77 Compare de la Mare, 'The Familiar', CP250, iii: 'O Master, thick cloud shuts thee out / And cold tempests of rain'; 'Fog', CP 241—42, iv: 'these Stygian veils of fog'.
- 78 'The Monologue' is discussed further in Chapter 9, 3(f).
- 79 'In the Perpetual Yesterday', TLS, 3 January 1919, p.7 (W.177).
- 80 *Broomsticks*, p.172.
- 81 *Beginning*, p.104. Compare the face that Nora sees with 'The Vision', CP496. Compare Traherne's 'Shadows in the Water', viii: 'Our second Selvs those Shadows be'. The other poems which treat of this inward companion and second self are: 'The Phantom', CP70—71; 'Haunted', CP130—31; 'The Voice', CP233; 'Who's That?', CP236; 'The Son of Melancholy', CP248—49; 'The Familiar', CP250; 'The Decoy', CP252; 'The Tomtit', CP470; 'Lost World', CP534; 'Go Far; Come Near', CP544.
- 82 See respectively: 'Tears, Idle Tears', line 2; 'Remembrance', viii; *The House of Life*, Sonnet 101, 'The One Hope', line 3. Compare: 'The profound hereditary sadness of English genius', Yeats, Introduction, *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), p.xx.
- 83 *Riddle*, p.154.
- 84 de la Mare, *Love*, pp. cxxxix.

(5) THE IDEAL FACE: DISCUSSION OF 'THE VISION'

- 85 See respectively: CP198; CP239—40; CP557, ix; CP627; CP491—92; CP200; CP250; CP495; CP496. Compare: 'a vision dark, divine' in 'Mourn'st Thou Now?', CP806; 'this far face' in 'Alas', CP807; 'A strange face in dreams' in 'A Sign', CP237—38. 'The Vision' is further discussed in Chapter 9, 3(g).
- 86 Compare 'Out of a Dream', CP495, ii:
A face — found; lost — of old:
Of a lifetime's longing the sum.
- 87 Compare 'The Shade', CP114; 'A Sign', CP238.
- 88 See respectively: *Broomsticks*, p.172; *Beginning*, pp.104, 120; *Ding Dong Bell*, p.74; *Riddle*, p.269. Compare the 'image of a face' in 'The Green Room', *On the Edge*, p.239; 'the presence' in *The Return*, p.267.
- 89 'A Woman's Genius', TLS, 22 January 1914, p.33 (W.74).

(6) SUBSIDIARY IMAGES: MUSIC AND THE ISLAND

- 90 See CP199; CP116. Other poems about music are: 'The Summons', CP456; 'Dust to Dust', CP212; 'Vain Questioning', CP204—05; *The Traveller*, CP513, iv. Compare Milton, *Il Penseroso*, 161:

There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full voic'd quire below,
In service high, and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heav'n before mine eyes.

- 91 Compare the Naiad in 'The Old Angler', x—xii, with the Water Midden in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, Chapter 21: 'Her slim hands, her stooping shoulders, were clear and pale as ivory, and Nod could see in the rosy glimmering of the flames her narrow, beautiful face reflected amid the gold of her hair upon the formless waters'(p.238).
- 92 BBC Radio 4, 'Kaleidoscope' broadcast 18 May 1978. See also Appendix II. Richard de la Mare said that the family knew all the musicians of the day, like Bliss, Constant Lambert, Adrian Boult and others.
- 93 *Tea*, p.59.
- 94 *Tea*, p.28.
- 95 *The Tempest*, III. 2. 147.
- 96 Compare 'Will Ever?', CP183—84, ii.
- 97 See 'Maps in Fact and Fiction', *TLS*, 30 July 1914, p.361 (W.88); 'In a Glass Darkly', *TLS*, 3 May 1917, p.211 (W.170); *Desert Islands*, pp. 15, 16.

(7) THE PARADISAL GOAL: DISCUSSION OF 'THE CREATURES'

- 98 *Stories from the Bible*, p. xiii.
- 99 The quotations from 'The Creatures' are respectively as follows: *Riddle*, pp. 275, 283, 274, 275, 276, 275, 278, 280.
- 100 Compare the face of the master of the house (pp.279—81) with the dark, lean, meditative face of the man who appears in the story 'What Dreams May Come', in Emmeline's strange dream of death, *Wind Blows Over*, p.19. Both may remind us of that queer, dramatic poem on death, 'The Feckless Dinner Party', CP281—82, and its sinister butler, Toomes. Compare the strange language of the birds here with the poem 'Incantation', CP368: 'The call of a bird, / . . . / A secret incantation on the air'. It is pertinent, too, to

note on p.283 how the archaic syntax, 'I was come back', and the words 'outwearied' and the incantatory 'forsaken', add to the sense of the strange and dreamlike atmosphere, and how this is enhanced by the exactly right choice of adjective 'primeval' in the next sentence.

- 101 See page 282. Note how often de la Mare used the word 'strange'. Compare: 'the familiar was become the strange' (p.285); the world 'is still infinitely discoverable, ineffably strange', *TLS*, 26 October 1916, p.506 (*W*.167), *PS*, p.12; 'a strange, absorbing, baffling world', *PV*, p.127; 'Everything in life indeed . . . is shot with strangeness', *Love*, p.cxxv; 'The Stranger', *CP*197,iv; 'The Unfinished Dream', *CP*246—47,xi; 'Music', *CP*247—48,vi; 'The Decoy', *CP*252,i; 'Futility', *CP*254,i. Compare also, Traherne, 'The Salutation', vii.
- 102 *Riddle*, pp. 282, 287, 288, 280, 283. Note the symbolism of the 'broad door' here, and compare p.274: 'As if that other gate were not for ever ajar, into God knows what of peace and mystery'; p.276: 'I was still of an age, you see, when my "small door" was ajar'; 'Chilling habit and enforced knowledge have not as yet dimmed his eyes, sapped his attention, or set only ajar a once wide-open door', *Love*, p.lvi; 'The Quiet Enemy', *CP*249—50, iii.
- 103 Compare: 'For he on honey-dew hath fed,/ And drunk the milk of Paradise' in *Kubla Khan*.
- 104 See 'The Spectacle', *CP*461—62.
- 105 See *Paradise Lost*, VII, 309—326; 387—498; *Stories from the Bible*, pp. 4, 6—7.
- 106 *Stories from the Bible*, p.8; compare *Paradise Lost*, VIII,471—77,488.
- 107 De la Mare had a great admiration for the wonder of the human body; see *Love*, p.cxi: 'A thing of such miraculous craftsmanship and aptitudes' (see Chapter 2 (8)).
- 108 References to *The Ancient Mariner* are to be found on p.277: 'Never was wedding-guest more desperately at the mercy of ancient mariner', and p.286: 'A ship in sail hung phantom-like on the horizon. I pined to call my discovery to its seamen'.
- 109 'Adam's Fall', vi. Compare 'All the Way', *CP*431; 'The Spectacle', *CP*461—62.
- 110 De la Mare quoted 'The World of Light' in *CH*, pp.283—84.
- 111 De la Mare described his Paradise also in: 'The Exile', *CP*201; 'Fog', *CP*241—42; 'The Unfinished Dream', *CP*246—47; 'A Dream', *CP*387; 'All the Way', *CP*431; 'The Spectacle', *CP*461; 'Under the Rose', *CP*450; 'Innocency', *CP*810.

- 112 Compare: 'The Imagination's Pride', CP243—44, iv,
Comfort thee, comfort thee. Thy Father knows
How wild man's ardent spirit, fainting, yearns
For mortal glimpse of death's immortal rose,
The garden where the invisible blossom burns.
- 'The Spectacle', CP461—62, iii:
This is the garden of paradise which in our folly
We abandoned long ages gone.
- 113 *Ash-Wednesday*, II, line 25; IV, line 10; VI, line 25.
- 114 See 'A Dream'. CP387, iv.
Compare *Ash-Wednesday*, I, lines 21—22:
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice . . .

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CHAPTER 9

THEME AND TECHNIQUE

- * Walter de la Mare, 'The Essential Wraith', *TLS*, 15 May 1919, p.263 (W.181).

(1) INTRODUCTION

- 1 *The Language Poets Use*, pp. 19,18,2. Compare de la Mare's words in *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (p.17): 'Nevertheless, it is always good, so far as it is possible, to *understand* what one reads. A deep and vivid understanding only adds to the joy it gives, and a few words may clear away a difficulty'.
- 2 See *L'Œuvre*, pp.329—407, particularly p.330, p.341.
- 3 See 'The Poetry of Walter de la Mare', *Ariel*, 1 (1970), p.30.
- 4 'Excursions and Alarums', *TLS*, 14 September 1922, p.580 (W.210). See also *Poetry in Prose*, *PS*, pp.86—96.
- 5 'Poets and Poetry', *Listener*, 14 November 1940, p.701.
- 6 General enquiries reveal that a large number of readers who have some knowledge of Walter de la Mare as a poet, remember reading at school particularly the poems 'Silver', *CP*181, and 'The Listeners', *CP*126.
- 7 *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), Penguin Books edition (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.51.
- 8 De la Mare is given no place, for example, in the anthology for students, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams, et al. (New York, 1962), revised edition, 2 vols (1968), whilst lesser poets such as Edward Thomas and Edwin Muir are included. This omission is less easy to understand than Michael Roberts's omission of de la Mare in his *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936), which appeared at the height of the anti-Georgian reaction and the revolt against the romantic tradition.
- 9 One aspect of de la Mare's poetry has, however, aroused a certain amount of academic interest, i.e. his metrical technique. The syn-copated rhythm of, for example, 'The Listeners', has been the subject of several articles and comments. See the studies on him by Forrest Reid, p.158; Duffin, pp.20—21, 37—38; Mégroz, pp.252—61 and Appendix C, pp.293—98; Bonnerot, pp.398—401; and comments by R. M. Pierson, 'The Meter of "The Listeners"', *English Studies*, 45, 5 October 1964, pp.373—81; Enid Hamer, *The Metres of English Poetry* (1930), p.284; M. R. Ridley, *Poetry and the Ordinary Reader* (1930), p.115.

- 10 *L'Œuvre*, pp.13, 15. Bonnerot points out here that I. A. Richards, Leavis and Randall Jarrell all thought of him as an out-of-date Romantic, trying to escape from the world in dreams. Other critics throughout the years who thought he lacked variety are: Willem van Doorn, who wrote of his restricted province, 'Walter de la Mare: An Appreciation', *English Studies*, 5 (1923), pp.1—22; R. A. Scott-James, who called him limited in range, *Fifty Years of English Literature, 1900—1950* (1951), 2nd edition 1956, p.118; and the anonymous reviewer of *The Complete Poems*, who thought he had only a limited range of subjects, *TLS*, 12 March 1970, p.281.
- 11 See previous discussion of this duality, and de la Mare's acute observation of the material world, Chapter 6(3), particularly pp. 196, 202.
- 12 De la Mare said of cats: 'I could never weary of them', *Animal Stories*, p.li. In 'The Owl', CP329—45, there is a long description of the bakery cat, and de la Mare's own feelings about cats appear to be put into the mouth of the baker's daughter:

'I dote on cats,' the wanton said.
'Dogs grovel and cringe at every nod;
Making of man a kind of God! . . .
Cats know their comfort, drowse and play,
And, when the dark comes, steal away —
Wild to the wild. Make *them* obey!
As soon make water run uphill. (CP339)

- 13 De la Mare wrote that a poet's aim 'must be to reflect life as we live it now, in reality and imagination', 'Poetic Drama: The Mis-choice of Theme', *TLS*, 9 October 1913, p.422 (W.65).
- 14 'Mere inorganic difficulty of construction is never evidence of profundity of thought or of complexity of feeling. Of the poetry that has survived its age, how very small a part is else than pure and clear in expression', de la Mare, 'Meredith's Early Poetry', *TLS*, 24 February 1910, p.63 (W.21); compare: 'No work of art indeed should advertise its art. Quite the reverse', de la Mare, *The Printing of Poetry* (1931), p.17.

(2) THE MATCHING OF POETIC THEME AND TECHNIQUE: DISCUSSION OF THE CAT POEMS

- 15 See T. S. Eliot, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939). Particularly relevant to de la Mare are Baudelaire's 'Les Chats': 'Amis de la science et de la volupté,/ Ils cherchent le silence et l'horreur des ténèbres'; 'Le Chat': '. . . chat mystérieux,/ Chat séraphique, chat étrange'.
- 16 'The Ad-dressing of cats', lines 5—8. Robert Donat recorded some of Eliot's cat poems, with music by Alan Rawsthorne, for example: 'The Old Gumbie Cat', 'Old Deuteronomy', 'Gus the Theatre Cat'. Compare also the modern Musical 'Cats'.

- 17 *Animal Stories*, p.xxxi.
- 18 University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Deed Box A, Box 10, 'Oddments in Prose', TS 'The Aged'.
- 19 *CH*, pp.536—38, Notes on No.98, 'The Monk and his Pet Cat', translated from the Irish by Kuno Meyer. Some of these notes are useful in glossing the section on a cat 'Once' in *WCh*. CP592—93: the Egyptians' swimming cat; the Irish cat Pangar; the cat 'Gazing meanwhile intently at the King'. For information about folklore on the cat, see Patricia Dale-Green, *Cult of the Cat* (1963); *The Golden Bough* (Abridged), pp. 72, 453, 656, 677.
- 20 Note particularly in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, 'The Three Cats', p.30; 'Four-Paws', p.65; the annotations on pp.210—211.
- 21 See respectively: *CH*, p.xiii; *Broomsticks*, pp. 103—134; The poems are: 'Five Eyes', CP173; 'Summer Evening', 'Earth Folk', CP174; 'Maerchen', CP251; 'Puss', CP268; 'Comfort', CP283; 'The Owl', CP329—45; 'Supper', CP427; 'Double Dutch', CP538; 'Once', *WCh*. CP592—93; 'Puss', CP619; 'Rats', CP619; 'The China Cat', CP712.
- 22 The other poems about this type of ordinary working cat are: 'Supper', CP427; 'Rats', CP619; 'Summer Evening', CP174; and the more domesticated house cats in 'Puss', CP268, and 'The Owl', CP329—45.
- 23 Compare the cats in 'Double Dutch', CP538; 'The Forest', CP539.
- 24 Compare the cats in 'Puss', CP619; *WCh*. CP592—93.

(a) The Poet of Actuality

- 25 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.18. A. E. Dyson wrote that the best of de la Mare's children's verse is as good as and indistinguishable from his best poetry for adults, Walter de la Mare's 'The Listeners', *Critical Quarterly*, 2 (1960), 150—54 (p.154).
- 26 Compare the robin who takes a crumb from little Bess and then flies away 'to his own wild being gone', 'The Robin', CP267.
- 27 Compare de la Mare's note on Harold Monro's cat poem in *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, p.210: 'which describes so vividly what a cat does, and even *feels* like, when saucer-of-milk-time comes round that in reading it one almost becomes a cat oneself'.
- 28 *Listener*, 14 November 1940, p.702.

- 29 See *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Eric Blom, 5th edition (1954), 'de la Mare, Walter', Vol.II, p.647; Bantock, Granville, Vol.I, p.404; Benjamin, Arthur, I, p.622; Berkeley, Lennox, I, p.645; Bliss, Sir Arthur, I, p.759; Britten, Benjamin, I, p.949; Branson, D., I, p.912; Davies, Henry Walford, II, p.611; Chanler, Theodore, II, p.163; Dyson, Sir George, II, p.847; Fricker, Peter R., III, p.498; Gibbs, Cecil Armstrong, III, p.635; Goossens, Eugene, III, p.714; Gurney, Ivor, III, p.855; Howells, Herbert, IV, p.389; Milford, Humphrey, V, p.757; Thompson, Mandall, VIII, p.429. See also: Francis Loring, 'The Songs' in *Programme of Walter de la Mare: 25 April 1873—22 June 1956, Centenary Recitals: presented by The Schubert Society of Great Britain in association with The Poetry Society*.

- 30 This is also well marked in the musical score by Cecil Armstrong Gibbs by the heavily stressed final, long-held notes.

- 31 This version is taken from the section on 'Nursery Rhymes' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1941), p.534 (a). Compare also 'Three Blind Mice'.

- 32 Compare a similar use of explosive language by Browning in 'Holy Cross Day':

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
 Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week,
 Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
 Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff.

- 33 W. H. Davies, in his poem 'The Cat', stated overtly and less successfully the same idea:

But cats to me are strange, so strange —
 I cannot sleep if one is near;
 And though I'm sure I see those eyes,
 I'm not so sure a body's there!

- 34 See 'The Listeners', CP126; compare 'Time Passes', CP127, iv: 'Its stair was broken'; 'The Phantom', CP33—35, vii: 'Around her loom the vacant rooms,/ Wind the upward stairs'; 'Hark', CP422—23: 'Only the creak of an empty stair;/ And the moon looking into the house'; 'The Feckless Dinner-Party', CP281—82: 'What dismal stairs'. The stair, the hall and the door are parts of one of de la Mare's favourite images — the mysterious, vacant, ruined, haunted house.

- 35 Spenser used the same kind of linguistic technique to produce a lulling, sleepy atmosphere in *The Faerie Queene*, I. l. 41.

And more, to lulle him in his slumber soft,
 A trickling streame from high rocke tumbling downe
 And ever-drizling raine upon the loft
 Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
 Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne . . .

(b) The Poet of Mystery, Myth and Fantasy

- 36 'The Personality of Walter de la Mare', *Listener*, 30 April 1953, p.712.
- 37 See *The Golden Bough* (Abridged), where the burning of cats is described: 'The cat, which represented the devil, could never suffer enough' (p.656).
- 38 The same atmosphere is created by Tennyson in 'Mariana', from which de la Mare quoted in *WCh*. CP580, marginalia i. He quoted the poem in full in *CH*, No.329, and in *Love*, No. 447, ii,vi,vii. Compare also: 'The Palace of Time', *WCh*. CP559—60; *Faerie Queene*, I.4.4.
- 39 Compare also stanza xiv:

'As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were
the crop:
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?'
And de la Mare's own 'The Revenant', CP199, i.
- 40 *Animal Stories*, p.xxvii. On page xxii de la Mare listed some of the stories in the book, citing for example, Puss in Boots, The Sleeping Beauty, and Dick Whittington. For the Sleeping Beauty theme see: 'The Sleeper', CP299; 'The Sleeping Beauty', CP35—36; 'Gold', CP251.
- 41 In *CH* de la Mare quoted 'The Fort of Rathangan', No.205, and commented in a note on the last line ('And the kings asleep in the ground'), on the foundering earth and Man's lost possessions (p.575). This may suggest that in 'Maerchen' the Man-King is dead and has lost his earthly possessions or, in dreaming, is as if dead. See Note 15 on Baudelaire's cats.
- 42 Compare 'Stranger, A Light I Pray', CP756; 'Traveller, Forbear', CP756; 'A Portrait', CP453—54, xvi: 'And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in'.
- 43 *L'Œuvre*, p.233. Night as a strange other world where Nature and not Man is all-powerful is seen in 'Evening', CP91, iv:

O, what an arch of light now spans
These fields by night no longer Man's!
- 44 See *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1908), p.128. See also Anna Balaikan, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York, 1967), p.84.
- 45 'A Quiet Life', *Essays by Divers Hands, Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom* (New Series, 20), edited by Gordon Bottomley (1943), 63—83 (p.78).

(c) The Poet of Quiet, Conversational Meditation

- 46 'The Seeing Eye', *Tribute*, p.62.
- 47 E. V. Knox writes: 'But what are we to say of "fur-about"? It is a noun I fancy, derived from furbelow', *Tribute*, p.62. There may also be an echo of 'roundabout'. De la Mare delighted in words and was not a purist about language. He wrote: 'A language stales. Not only new terms for new-found needs — and the imagination to coin them — are required to give it freshness, colour and vivacity, but an abundance of approximate synonyms', 'A Book of Words', *TLS*, 1 June 1922, 349—50 (p.350) (*W*.209). Compare: 'A living language is in sad straits when it becomes the passive prey of the grammarian and ceases to be the despair of the lexicographer', de la Mare, 'Current Literature', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 219 (1914), p.153.
- 48 *BTD*, p.24.
- 49 There is yet again an echo of Browning in these lines — both of 'Prospice' and '*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*'.
- 50 Gottfried Benn believed that the lyric, because it is naturally short, must be as near perfect as possible: 'In der Lyrik das Mittelmässige schlechthin unerlaubt und unerträglich ist, ihr Feld ist schmal, ihre Mittel sehr subtil, . . . demnach müssen auch die Massstäbe extrem sein', *Probleme der Lyrik*, p.18.
- 51 'Some Women Novelists', *PS*, p.239.
- 52 'The Complete Works of Thackeray', *TLS*, 29 June 1911, p.242 (*W*.37), *PV*, p.46.
- 53 'Every work of art . . . has as it were a frame', de la Mare, TS of an article and 24 sonnets for Leonard Russell and *The Saturday Book*, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Box 10, Deed Box A.

(3) HIS LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUE: ANALYSES OF SEVEN POEMS

(a) 'The Ghost'

- 54 For previous discussion of 'The Ghost', see Chapter 4, pp.121,122.
- 55 'Mr de la Mare is a metrical genius . . . but what makes him unique is his uncanny power of conveying by mere suggestion a sense of "unknown modes of being" surrounding and permeating this visible life', Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry* (1944), p.491.
- 56 See Note 9.
- 57 Although Hopkins died in 1889 his work was virtually unknown until Bridges published his poems in 1918.

- 58 *Poetry in Prose*, *PS*, p.117.
- 59 'Origin and Elements of Metre', *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 18.
- 60 *PS*, pp. 109, 111.
- 61 *Poetry in Prose*, *PS*, p.112.
- 62 *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 18, Everyman's Library (1906), p.197.
- 63 *Beginning*, pp.176—216. The Folio Society published *Ghost Stories* by de la Mare (1956), which contained the following stories: 'Out of the Deep', 'The House', 'Revenant', 'The Green Room', 'Bad Company', 'The Quincunx', and 'An Anniversary'.
- 64 Compare: 'Vigil', *CP*205; 'Winter Dusk', *CP*132; and Browning's 'The Householder'.
- 65 Introduction to *The Ghost Book*, p.25.
- 66 'Eleven Ghosts', *TLS*, 8 January 1920, p.19 (*W*.201).
- 67 *The Golden Bough* (Abridged), pp. 207, 558, 115. There are a number of references to the thorn in the poems: 'Autumn', *CP*97; 'Exile', *CP*115; 'The Hawthorn Hath a Deathly Smell', *CP*135; 'Unheard Melodies', *CP*362; 'She Said', *CP*521.
- 68 See Note 62, Chapter 8 (4).
- 69 Note that in 'The Ghost', out of a total of 124 words, all but ten are monosyllables.
- 70 Compare the similar ghostly poem 'Echo', *CP*94,iii: 'Eyes in the green, in the shade,/ In the motionless brake . . .' which is discussed later in 3 (b).
- 71 'The Poems of Ralph Hodgson', *TLS*, 7 October 1915, p.342 (*W*.135).

(b) 'Echo'

- 72 For previous discussion of 'Echo', see Chapter 5 (d), pp.167—68.
- 73 Compare: 'I had a secret laughter,/ I laughed it near the wall', 'The Buckle', *CP*6, with its unexpected, deviant use of the verb 'laugh'.
- 74 Note the word 'uncontrived'. Ezra Pound said that the poet should know assonance and alliteration and rhyme etc. as a musician would expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft. This is indeed the impression one gets from de la Mare's poetic technical equipment.

- 75 Compare the discussion on the formal organisation of 'The Ghost' in 3 (a), particularly pp. 314-15.

(c) 'The Song of Finis'

- 76 See Chapter 7 (3).
- 77 De la Mare called *The Ancient Mariner* one of the loveliest and most magical poems in the language, *Animal Stories*, p.xli. In *Poetry in Prose* he wrote: 'Nevertheless the poem itself is perhaps the most imaginative and romantic in the language, and resembles in its magic an ideal architecture, "frozen music"', *PS*, p.142. Victoria Sackville-West compared *The Ancient Mariner* to *The Traveller* in 'Walter de la Mare and *The Traveller*', in *Proceedings of The British Academy*, 39(1953), p.33 (Warton Lecture on English Poetry, 7 January 1953).
- 78 'Poet and Novelist', *TLS*, 15 April 1920, p.235 (W.204).
- 79 Compare for a similar use of negatives 'The Enchanted Hill', *CP*260—61: 'No mist, no wind, above, below;/ No living thing strays to and fro./ No bird replies to bird on high . . .'
- 80 Note particularly the alliteration of the initial letter 'A' in stanza i, where it is used eleven times, with the repetitive use of the monosyllables 'At', 'A', 'And', 'As'; also 'His' and, in stanza ii, 'No'.

(d) 'The Railway Junction'

- 81 See Chapter 7 (4). The poem appeared in *The Fleeting* (1933).
- 82 'As if, indeed, thoughts could be like fragments of glass, reflecting light at their every edge and angle', de la Mare, 'The Looking Glass', *Riddle*, p.65.
- 83 'All That's Past', *CP*116—17, ii.
- 84 De la Mare quoted from Donne's 'The Second Anniversary' in his review of *The Poems of John Donne*, edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson: 'For us in this solitude with him, at any moment a further door may quietly open, and Death, like a groom, will bring a "taper to the outward room". "The last busie day" done, we shall "ebbe out with them, who homeward goe"; and then, "good morrow to our waking soules"', *Edinburgh Review*, April 1913, *PV*, p.161.
- 85 See Chapter 8 (4), Note 65, for a list of de la Mare's poems where the cage image is used, and note particularly: 'Behind his iron bars / The captive broods', 'A Young Girl', *CP*306, ii; ' . . . this *Cage* that we are in —', *WCh*. *CP*586, ix.

- 86 'The New Letter Writer', *TLS*, 17 February 1916, pp.73—74 (W.147). Compare Shelley's sonnet 'Lift not the painted veil which those who live / Call Life'.
- 87 For a similar technical linguistic contrast between the 'wild world' and the peaceful life, achieved by similar phonological means (i.e. cacophony and euphony), compare Dowson's 'Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration', discussed by the present writer in 'The Poetry of Ernest Dowson: a Brief Reappraisal' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1977), pp.24—29.
- 88 Compare: 'The form of a poem, indeed, it cannot too often be repeated, is inseparable from its context', 'On the Threshold', *TLS*, 13 November 1919, p.647 (W.194).
- 89 An example, perhaps, of Wallace Stevens's 'swift, circular line', which Winifred Novotny writes about in *The Language Poets Use*, p.222.
- 90 *Connoisseur*, p.319.
- 91 *The Nature of Poetry* (New York, 1946), p.252.

(e) 'The Cage'

- 92 See Chapter 8 (4).
- 93 Note the similar effect achieved by Arnold in 'Dover Beach', iii.
- 94 See Russell Brain, in *Tea*, pp.30—31, where he tells us that de la Mare quoted 'Break, break, break, / On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!' and commented on the effects of repetition and alliteration and their importance.
- 95 *Essay on English Metrical Law* (1857).

(f) 'The Monologue'

- 96 See Chapter 8 (4) for previous discussion of 'The Monologue'.
- 97 The syllable count is very varied:
- (i) 6.4.6.4.8.4.
 - (ii) 6.4.6.6.6.4.
 - (iii) 5.6.6.4.6.5.
 - (iv) 5.5.5.5.7.3.
 - (v) 5.5.5.5.6.4.
 - (vi) 5.5.6.4.6.4.
 - (vii) 4.6.6.4.6.4.
 - (viii) 5.4.6.5.6.3.
 - (ix) 4.6.6.5.7.4.
 - (x) 4.6.6.5.6.5.

- 98 Compare 'When clanks the pannikin' (45) with *Othello*, II. 3. 72:
And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink.

(g) 'The Vision'

- 99 See Chapter 8 (5) for previous discussion of 'The Vision'.
- 100 *PS*, 'Technical Ingredients', pp.86—96. But note also the original lecture before revision, pp.9, 29.
- 101 See *Paradise Lost*, IV, 268—72.
- 102 See Note 95.
- 103 See: Douglas Garman, 'Walter de la Mare', *Scrutinies*, p.49; Edmund Gosse, *Books on the Table* (1921), p.313; Owen Barfield, 'Poetry in Walter de la Mare', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 8 (1973), p.73. In a footnote to p.73 of his article, Barfield relates how, when he complimented de la Mare on his 'remarkable use of inversions', de la Mare replied disconcertingly, 'Aren't inversions natural?'
- 104 Forrest Reid quotes, for instance, a poem 'Flotsam', *CP*607, where the inversion is overdone, *Walter de la Mare*, pp.178—79. Compare also 'The Last Coachload', *CP*256—57.
- 105 *Essay on English Metrical Law* (1857).

(4) CONCLUSION

- 106 One of de la Mare's favourite poets, Herrick, used the tercet in 'Upon Julia's Clothes'. It was also used by an obscure Caroline poet, Edward Benlowes, in *Theophila; or, Loves Sacrifice: A Divine Poem* (1652). It has not been much used in English poetry, however.
- 107 'A Futurist of the Sixties', *TLS*, 26 February 1914, p.97 (W.76).
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PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH MR RICHARD DE LA MARE

- 1 Richard de la Mare, Charles Causley and Vaughan, BBC Radio 4 programme 'Kaleidoscope', broadcast 18 May 1978.
 - 2 *A Choice of de la Mare's Verse*, p.25.
 - 3 *Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study*.
 - 4 In *Figures in Modern Literature*, for example.
 - 5 Russell Brain began his friendship with Walter de la Mare in 1942 through correspondence, nine years before he actually met him. De la Mare first invited him to tea on 11th August, 1951 at South End House, Montpelier Row, Twickenham, and his *Tea with Walter de la Mare* was a record of the 'tea-talks' they shared until de la Mare's death.
 - 6 'Walter de la Mare, Book Reviewer', *Boston University Studies in English*, I (1955—56), pp.211—36.
 - 7 This biography is now (1984) completed and is to be published shortly.
 - 8 See *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922—1949* (1949), pp. 189—90.
 - 9 'A Memory of 1917—18', in *Tribute*, 86—90 (p.88).
 - 10 See Kunitz, *Twentieth Century Authors*, p.365.
 - 11 'What Lovely Things', in *Tribute*, p.15.
 - 12 H. S. Bellamy, *Built Before the Flood: The Problem of the Tiahuanaco Ruins* (1943).
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B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- A. MANUSCRIPT AND UNPUBLISHED SOURCES
- B. PERIODICALS
- C. WORKS BY WALTER DE LA MARE CITED IN THE TEXT
- D. OTHER WORKS CITED IN THE TEXT
- E. SELECTED SUPPLEMENTARY LIST

NOTE ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

A complete bibliography of the works of Walter de la Mare is outside the scope of this thesis, and I have listed only the works cited in the text (C). Manuscript and unpublished sources (A); the series of periodicals most frequently referred to (B); other works cited in the text (D), and a selection of supplementary material consulted (E), are also listed.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Luce Bonnerot, *L'Œuvre de Walter de la Mare: Une aventure spirituelle* (Paris, 1969), contains a valuable bibliography (pp.473—517). She gives a useful, chronological list of de la Mare's works (pp.475—93); his BBC talks published in *The Listener* (p.493); his lectures to the Royal Society of Literature (p.496); recordings of his works (pp. 497—98), and translations of his works up to 1965 (pp.499—500). Her chronological list of critical works about de la Mare from 1916—1967 is also useful (pp.501—10). She lists earlier bibliographies (p.474):

1. Henry Danielson, 'De la Mare', *Bibliographies of Modern Authors* (1st Series), *Bookman's Journal* (1921), pp.27—34.
2. Gwendolen Murphy, 'Walter de la Mare', *Bibliographies of Modern Authors*, No.1, *London Mercury*, 15 (March 1927), pp.526—31; 15 (April 1927), pp.635—39; 16 (May 1927), pp.70—73.
3. Leonard Clark, 'A Handlist of the Writings in Book Form, 1902—1953, of Walter de la Mare', *Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 6 (1954). Addendum, *SB*, 8 (1956).
4. Leonard Clark, 'Walter de la Mare: A Checklist prepared on the occasion of an exhibition of his books and mss at The National Book League, April 20 to May 19 1956' (Cambridge, 1956).
5. Edward Wagenknecht, 'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the *London Times Literary Supplement*', *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), pp. 243—55.

Note: *The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare* (1969), contains a useful Bibliographical Appendix (pp.889—899).

A. MANUSCRIPT AND UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

1. THE WALTER DE LA MARE PAPERS

Oxford, Bodleian Library. A provisional schedule (as at 1980), lists Manuscripts, Typescripts and Associated Material, collected in: Fireproof Safe (Boxes 1—7); Deed Box A (Boxes 8—11); Deed Box B (Boxes 12—16); Deed Box C (Boxes 17—19); Deed Box D (Boxes 20—24); Deed Box E (Boxes 24—30); Deed Box F (Boxes 31—34), and some additional parcels. References in the text are to material in Deed Box A, Box 10 (Bodleian A,10), i.e.: TSS, 'On Childhood', and on 'The Aged', in Oddments in Prose, Prose fragments, c. 20 pages MS and TS; TS, corrected, of an article, 'Must England's Beauty Perish?' and news-cutting; TSS, heavily corrected carbon of Papers re Article and 24 sonnets (by various writers), for *Saturday Book*.

2. LETTERS

Oxford, Bodleian Library. MS Letters of Edward Thomas to Walter de la Mare, c.1906—1917, MS Engl. Lett. C376.

Edinburgh, University Library. MS Letters of Walter de la Mare to Miss J. G. Sime, 1940—1952, MS GEN 715/1, nos. 1—38.

Edinburgh, University Library. MS Letters of Walter de la Mare to Dr Frank Carr Nicholson and Mrs Mary Nicholson, 1941—1956, with 17 Xerox replies, MS, GEN 715/1, nos. 39—91

Personal Communications. From: Mr Richard de la Mare, Letter, 27 April 1978, and Interview, 25 July 1978; Mr John Lehmann, Letter, 1 May 1979; Madame Luce Bonnerot, Letter, 7 March 1981; Mr Humphrey Carpenter, Letter, 5 September 1983.

3. BROADCAST

BBC Radio 4, 'Kaleidoscope', broadcast 18 May 1978: Richard de la Mare, Charles Causley and Vaughan discuss the Faber and Faber paper-back production (1978) of Walter de la Mare's *Collected Rhymes and Verses* (1944).

B. PERIODICALS

The main body of material consulted has been the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1910—1978, and in particular Walter de la Mare's unsigned contributions from 1908 to 1938 identified by Edward Wagenknecht in 'A List of Walter de la Mare's Contributions to the London *Times Literary Supplement*' (numbered 1 to 214), *Boston University Studies in English*, 1, 4 (1955—56), pp. 243—55. These do not appear separately in the Bibliography (A), as full details are given in Wagenknecht's list. Articles in other periodicals, however, have been listed individually in the Bibliography.

C. WORKS BY WALTER DE LA MARE CITED IN THE TEXT

'After the Wessex Edition', Review of *A Changed Man* by Thomas Hardy, *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, 1 November 1913, reprinted in *Private View* (1953), pp. 28—33

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The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare (1969)

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